未踏召喚：ブラッドサイン 9

The unexplored summon://blood-sign IX

鎌池和馬

イラスト：依河和希

電撃文庫

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Mitou Shoukan://Blood-Sign vol.6

by Kazuma Kamachi

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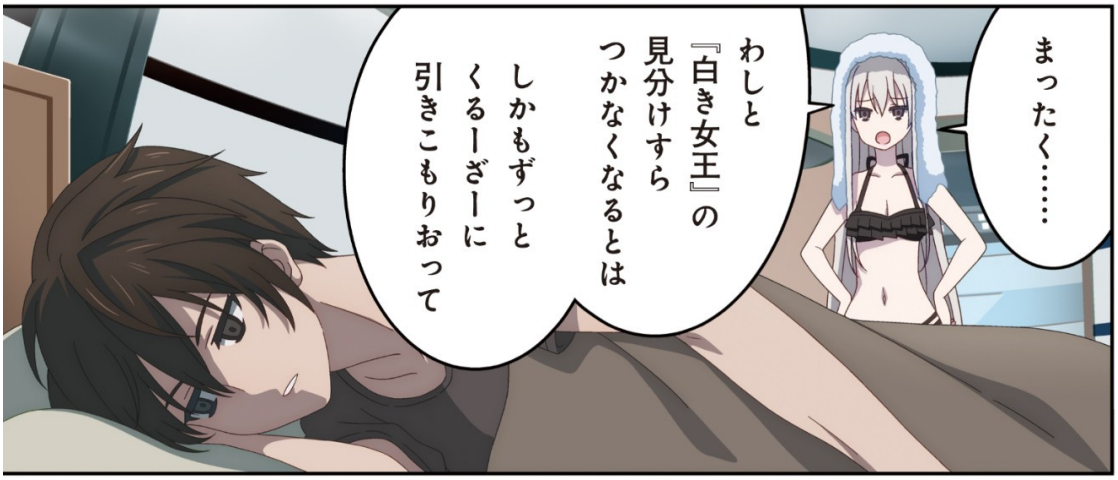
9 未踏召喚：//ブラッドサイン

鎌池和馬 イラスト：依河和希

夏じゃ！
皆(みな)が
水着になって
バカンスを楽しむ
愛と欲望
渦巻く季節じゃ!!
ふっふっふ～♪
この『黒びきに』で
恭介もわしに
ベタぼれじゃな！
ザバーン
冥乃河葵【めいのかわ・あおい】
人類最古の完全人工物である浄瑠璃方式の依代。
「白き女王」と見た目がそっくりで、
混乱に巻き込まれないよう
クルーザーに匿われている。

うわーん
小僧ぅー！
釣り餌が
降りかかってきて
気持ち悪いのじゃ
取っておくれ～
城山恭介【しろやま・きょうすけ】
『フリーダム』に属する最強の召喚師。
ただし今回は覇気がないようで……？
なっ！
なっ！
これはこれで
嬉しいのじゃが……
なんだか妙に
手馴れておるのう

……だんだん
わかってきたぞ
さてはこれ
わしに対する
扱いではないな？
おぬし
わしを『白き女王』と
勘違いしておるじゃろ
それで無意識に
箱庭時代の女王にやっていた
ことをしておるわけか


まったく……
わしと
『白き女王』の
見分けすら
つかなくなるとは
しかもずっと
くるーざーに
引きこもりおって

恩師の信楽真沙美が
白き女王の側に
ついたのが
よっぽど
堪えておるのか……

これはまた
重症じゃのう

城山恭介の
ルーツ
箱庭以前の
彼のことを
知るために
白き女王は
『人間を知る旅』に
出る

『白き女王』
全被召物（マテリアル）の頂点に立つ存在。
戦装束『真実の剣』が暴走したため、
今回はお召し替え。

プレゼント大作戦ですか
まったく……
そのような顔を最初から恭介君にさらけ出せていれば

ここまで事態がこじれることもなかったでしょうに

ありふれた住宅街
僕たちはそこで生まれドクトルSに育てられた

僕たち……じゃと？

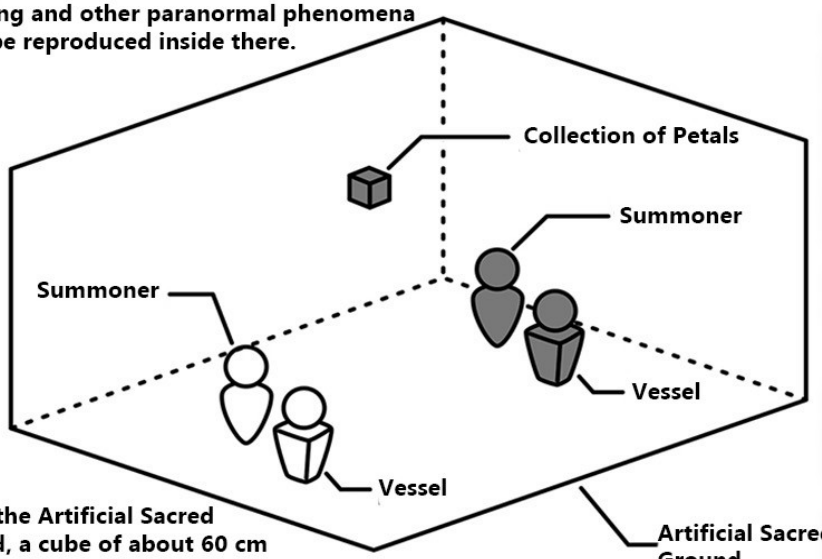
ヤツの子供が
僕しかいない
なんて
誰も言って
いない
だろう？
妹が
いたんだよ
受け取って
ほしいなぁ……
あにうえ

Battle Tutorial

The Summoning Battle begins when one of the summoners uses an Incense Grenade.

phase 1

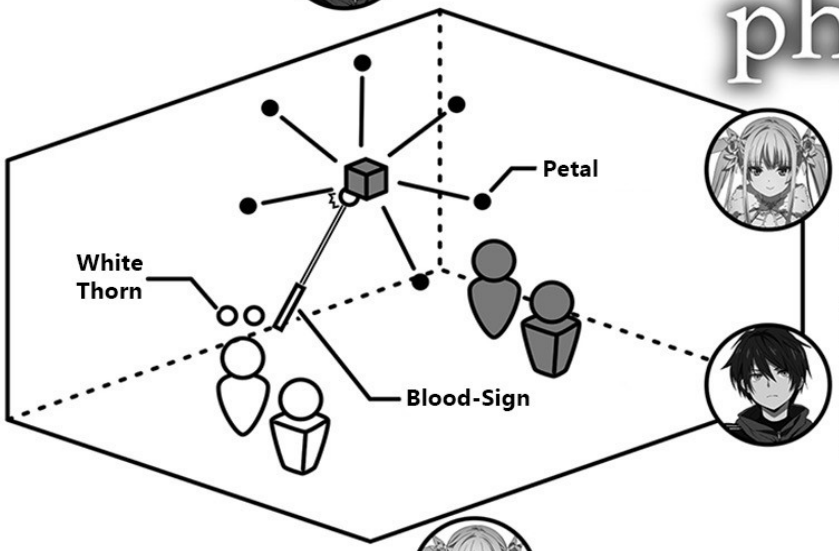
When the Incense Grenade is used, an Artificial Sacred Ground forms around them. Summoning and other paranormal phenomena can only be reproduced inside there.



Inside the Artificial Sacred Ground, a cube of about 60 cm appears at the midpoint between the summoners.

It is a collection of the 216 Petals which are red spheres about the size of an apple.

phase 2



3 white spheres known as White Thorns appear with each summoner. Those are hit with a long staff known as a Blood-Sign and they collide with the Petals.

You hit the Petals with the White Thorns in order to knock them into the spherical Spots that appear in 36 locations inside the Artificial Sacred Ground.

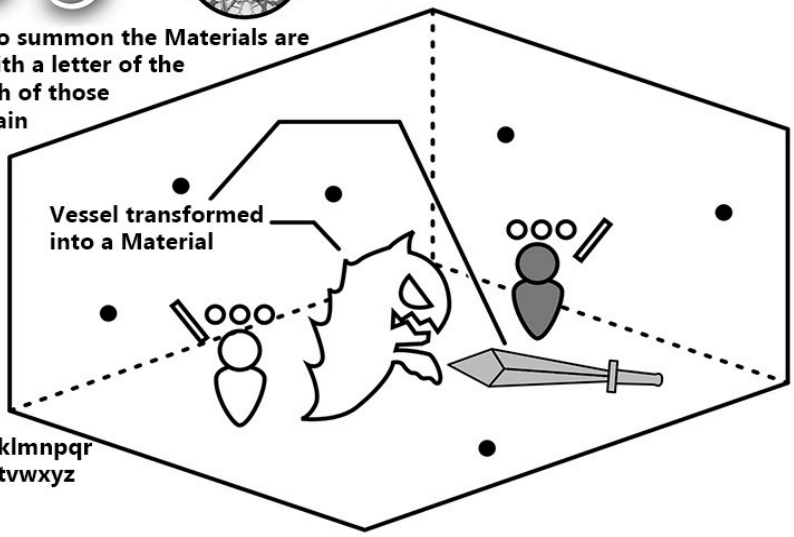
What Petals are hit into the Spots changes what can be summoned.

And the vessel's body is used to create...

phase 3

...a Material. The summoners use them for a fight to the death.

The Petals used to summon the Materials are each engraved with a letter of the alphabet and each of those belongs to a certain Sound Range.



aiueo are vowels and thus the Lowest Sound Range. As for the consonants, bcdfghj are Low, klmnpqr are Middle, and stvwxyz are High.

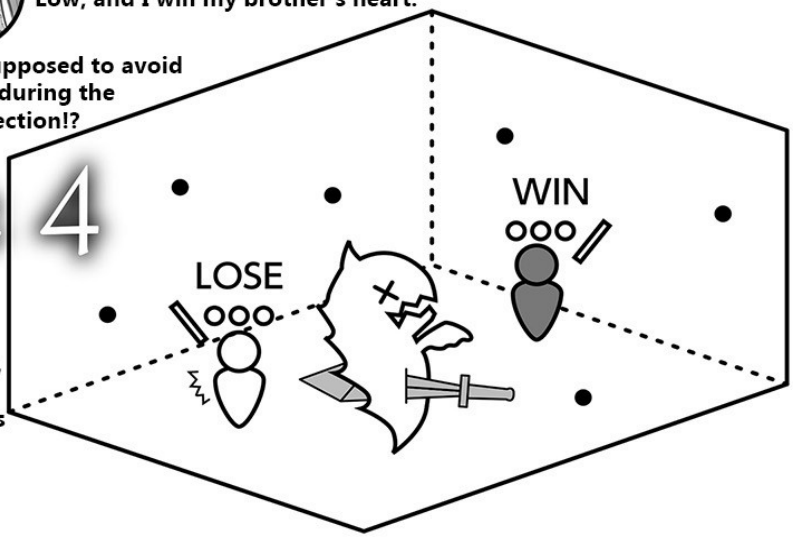
There are of course rules governing the summoned Materials and they are based on the Petals' rules.

Low wins against High, High wins against Middle, Middle wins against Low, and I win my brother's heart.

Weren't we supposed to avoid making jokes during the explanation section!?

phase 4

And after the vessels transform into Materials, they continued to be updated into new forms as they fight.



The Materials start at Regulation-class. After summoning 100 of those, you gain the right to summon the higher Divine-class. And after summoning 50 of those, you gain the right to summon the even higher Unexplored-class.

The vessel has a core known as their Silhouette. If that is destroyed, the battle ends. The losing summoner and vessel will become dolls that wander around in a stupor.

And that concludes our simple explanation of the Summoning Battle. As a summoner fights more and more battles, they earn more titles known as Awards. And if their number of Awards reaches 1000...hee hee hee. Now, I wonder what happens then.

Phase 1
Upper Cube: Collection of Petals
Left Dark Figure: Summoner
Right Dark Figure: Vessel
Left White Figure: Summoner
Right White Figure: Vessel
Overall Box: Artificial Sacred Ground

K: The Summoning Battle begins when one of the summoners uses an Incense Grenade.
Q: When the Incense Grenade is used, an Artificial Sacred Ground forms around them. Summoning and other paranormal phenomena can only be reproduced inside there.
Q: Inside the Artificial Sacred Ground, a cube of about 60 cm appears at the midpoint between the summoners.
K: It is a collection of the 216 Petals which are red spheres about the size of an apple.

Phase 2
Dark Ball: Petal
White Ball: White Thorn
White Stick: Blood-Sign

Q: 3 white spheres known as White Thorns appear with each summoner. Those are hit with a long staff known as a Blood-Sign and they collide with the Petals.
K: You hit the Petals with the White Thorns in order to knock them into the spherical Spots that appear in 36 locations inside the Artificial Sacred Ground.
Q: What Petals are hit into the Spots changes what can be summoned.
K: And the vessel’s body is used to create…

Phase 3
White Monster and Dark Sword: Vessel transformed into a Material

Q: …a Material. The summoners use them for a fight to the death.
K: The Petals used to summon the Materials are each engraved with a letter of the alphabet and each of those belongs to a certain Sound Range.

Q: aiueo are vowels and thus the Lowest Sound Range. As for the consonants, bcdfghj are Low, klmnpqr are Middle, and stvwxyz are High.
K: There are of course rules governing the summoned Materials and they are based on the Petals' rules.
Q: Low wins against High, High wins against Middle, Middle wins against Low, and I win my brother's heart.
K: Weren't we supposed to avoid making jokes during the explanation section!?

Phase 4

K: And after the vessels transform into Materials, they continued to be updated into new forms as they fight.
Q: The Materials start at Regulation-class. After summoning 100 of those, you gain the right to summon the higher Divine-class. And after summoning 50 of those, you gain the right to summon the even higher Unexplored-class.
K: The vessel has a core known as their Silhouette. If that is destroyed, the battle ends. The losing summoner and vessel will become dolls that wander around in a stupor.
Q: And that concludes our simple explanation of the Summoning Battle. As a summoner fights more and more battles, they earn more titles known as Awards. And if their number of Awards reaches 1000…hee hee hee. Now, I wonder what happens then.

Prologue

I loved you, brother.
You were the one and only person I could say I truly, truly loved from the very bottom of my heart.

All of the Unexplored-classes waiting for me in the other world fell apart too easily and everyone in the human world grew distorted and corrupted all on their own and then bowed down to me. They threw out all questions of morality or personal preference, leaving them with no core or center. What was I supposed to think when I saw that? But during it all, I found you, brother. You and only you maintained an unwavering heart when you gazed upon me.
I questioned it.
That eventually grew into a longing.
I wanted you.
I wanted the being I call “brother” no matter what it took. I wanted to make you mine. I wanted you all to myself. I refused to let anyone else have you.
I was confident I had been born a girl because you were a boy.
But you were not easily won over. Even when I gave you strength, threatened you with my strength, tempted you with my beautiful side, or mocked you with my ugly side.
Nothing went my way, but that was exactly what latched onto my heart and would not let go. I knew you would be able to support me. Does that not seem like enough? Or do you think I sound spoiled? But no matter how complexly the historians and theologians try to describe me, that was all there was to me. It was thanks to that one thing I could not have that I saw greater depth in this world and never gave up on it.

Oh? You want to know why I keep using the past tense?
Figure it out for yourself, you sack of shit.

Facts

- Love is easily converted into hate. But the feelings that remain throughout are true emotions.

Opening X-01: The Cowardly King Defeated

“Oh, the Chinese food girl!!”
“I am not a housemaid. And don’t get up like that. I can see your boobs. Every bit of them.”
(Opening X-01 Open 08/20 14:00)
The Cowardly King Defeated

Toy Dream 35 was a giant amusement park city made from high-rise buildings jutting directly up from the ocean. At the very lowest level, there was a yacht harbor at the base of the buildings and several yachts, cruisers, motorboats, and more were moored there.
A groaning voice could be heard on one of those.
“Nnn.”
A woman with long silver hair lay face down on a beach chair she had dragged out onto a large cruiser’s deck. Every little movement produced a vivid change in the lines of her back and shoulder blades. She wore a black bikini, but with the top (which had a frilly cloth placed over it) untied, it was not clear if that qualified as “wearing” it. That exposed the line of her spine more than necessary. Her chest was fully protected by being softly squished between her body and the beach chair. The sun was blocked by more than just the fluffy cumulonimbus clouds. The many buildings and giant bridges chopped the summer sunlight to pieces, but she had found an unobstructed sunbeam to bathe in. With just the one ray hitting her with such pinpoint accuracy, it looked something like she was being fried in a solar cooker.
Her name was Meinokawa Aoi.
She was an artificial Joruri Method created to look just like the superior being known as the White Queen. Aoi was an artificial being but also a high-level vessel. She had gone to live with a certain summoner boy to avoid being attacked or stolen in the chaotic world created by the Queen’s death at the hands of the Colorless Little Girl. But at the time of that event, the real White Queen had taken her place and Aoi herself had not played much of a role. She was not quite sure what it meant that the Colorless Little Girl’s internal structure had been damaged by psychogenic shock after successfully killing the White Queen.

And yet…
“Gwohhh! I’m so bored. The fishing rod just sits there without getting a single bite and my host is busy being a pathetic coward.”
She kicked her bare feet around and said far more than a freeloader should, but she was not far from the truth. Shiroyama Kyousuke had been in an awful state ever since running across the White Queen and the supposedly dead Shigara Masami at the border of Eastern Europe’s Kingdom F. He had been sleeping ever since. He had been sulking and refusing to leave the bed. You just had to step inside the cruiser and take a peek inside the cabin. He was alone with such a pretty and sexy silver-haired girl, but he was hogging the entire double bed in complete violation of the ironclad “ladies first” rule. He never tried to peep on her in the bath and he did not stumble in on her while she was changing for a “kyah, pervert!” scene. When she put all her effort into a fabulous swimsuit apron ensemble, he completely ignored it. When she thought he was finally getting up, he just poured some cereal and milk in a bowl and ate it. What kind of summer was this? Wasn’t summer supposed to be an exciting mixture of love and desire? Meinokawa Aoi was about ready to kill him.
Then a visitor arrived at the gloomy cruiser.
“Hello, old-fashioned clockwork granny. No change in Kyousuke-chan I assume?”
“Oh, the Chinese food girl!!”
“I am not a housemaid. And don’t get up like that. I can see your boobs. Every bit of them.”
The silver-haired shrine maiden hopped up from the beach chair (with her long hair protecting the greatest secrets of the Joruri Method) like Pavlov’s dog. But what choice did she have when this modified China dress beauty named Lu Niang Lan always made such scrumptious food when she visited?
“Oh, whoops”, said Aoi like usual as she reached behind her back to retie the strap to her black bikini top which had a frilly cloth on top.
“Are you here to see that host boy again? That will just bore you, so go make some food.”
“Heh heh. You still have a lot to learn about Kyousuke-chan, emotional android girl. The true Kyousuke-chan experts can adore him just by looking at him. So bow down to me or I won’t make you any food.”
“Yes, my mistress.”
The bikini beauty showed reverence like something from a samurai film and Lu Niang Lan walked in from the deck. It had a living room, a kitchen, a bathroom, and a bedroom. If you ignored the cramped bath which give more room for the shower space, it was actually a more comfortable living space than a student apartment.
But the modified China dress beauty shivered from the chill of the excessive air conditioning inside the dimly lit cabin. She shut one eye and held her bangs back with a hand.

“He’s rotting away in here, isn’t he? I thought it was supposed to be August.”
“See, what did I tell you? He has none of the love and desire needed for a proper summer break. Don’t think I haven’t been trying my best. I went with the Ama-no-Iwato strategy based in the history and traditions of a shrine maiden, but this limp-dicked bastard hasn’t reacted at all!! That really hurts!!”
“You might not think it by looking at him, but Kyousuke-chan has some childish delusions about girls. Act too openly around him and he might find it obscene.”
“Tch! If you knew what he liked, you should have told me!! So I should have gone the pure lady course with a wide-brimmed white hat and a long dress!!”
“You need to be careful so he doesn’t mistake your silhouette for the White Queen. Do you want to dig back up his trauma with your smile, you hunk of junk?”
They were complaining while approaching the double bed, but the lump in the blankets did not move in the slightest. Freedom Award 903, Alice (with) Rabbit, had even the top of his head covered. He was acting more like the tortoise than the hare.
It was true the events at the border of Eastern Europe’s Kingdom F had been shocking.
The world’s largest army had not been the problem. He had made short work of them, devoted a lot of his strength to stopping the Colorless Little Girl’s rampage, and then been helpless when the White Queen appeared before him without warning. Shiroyama Kyousuke might have died there if not for the intervention of Shigara Masami who had the ridiculous accomplishment of reaching Freedom Award 3000.
And more than that…
“Was it really that much of a shock?”
Lu Niang Lan did not hesitate to sit on the edge of the bed the boy was sleeping in. She crossed her long legs and spoke back over her shoulder.
“That your teacher, Shigara Masami, took the White Queen’s side, I mean.”

Facts

- After the events at the border of Eastern Europe’s Kingdom F, Shiroyama Kyousuke has stayed in bed out of shock.
- Meinokawa Aoi, who looks abnormally similar to the White Queen, is hiding in Kyousuke’s cruiser so she is not attacked or stolen during the chaos as the world breaks down.
- Meinokawa Aoi was wearing a bikini as part of an Ama-no-Iwato strategy meant to snap Shiroyama Kyousuke out of it, but her plan failed.
- Lu Niang Lan has already successfully won over Meinokawa Aoi using food.
- Shigara Masami, Freedom Award 3000 and the person who once survived a hell by shifting from one world to the other, chose the White Queen’s side after saving Kyousuke.

Opening X-02: The White Queen's First Battle?

"Shigara Masami"
"I get it, so just give me something to wear already."
(Opening X-02 Open 08/04 10:20 "UTC+03 Flanguild Time" "Rewind Mode")
The White Queen's First Battle?

To describe the current situation, we must first rewind time into the past. That brings us to the morning of August 4 at the border of Eastern Europe's Kingdom F.
To start with, a fearsome white light swept across everything.
The world's largest army's unilateral invasion, the Colorless Little Girl's rampage, the White Queen's appearance, and Freedom Award 3000, Shigara Masami, rescuing Shiroyama Kyousuke may have been no more than the triggers.
Some said it looked like a large domed explosion and others said it looked like a gigantic pure white cocoon. No one knew what it actually was. But perhaps that was not too surprising since no one had ever seen the White Queen driven to such desperate measures. Even with Freedom Award 3000 around, it was a highly abnormal situation.
Whatever the case, something burst from the White Queen.
It grew into a dome shape in the blink of an eye and it continued to expand even several hours later. If this continued, it would cross the national border and swallow up Queen Sinceria Highland's Kingdom F.
It currently had a diameter of about 5km.
"Don't touch it!! We have no idea what would happen!!"
"We can't even put together an evacuation plan if we don't know what it is or what it's made of! I volunteer!!"
"You fool, how would I ever explain it to your family!?"
The knights of Kingdom F included quite a few summoners, but even they were baffled. They made it sound like they were up against a highly-concentrated radioactive material or a mysterious deadly pathogen, but when they risked their lives to investigate, all they discovered was that the material was a lot like the Sword of Truth, the pure white clothing worn by

the White Queen. Since this was information about a higher being, it meant a lot that a few of the knights had successfully summoned her in the past. And if that was true, there was nothing humankind could do. After all, this was the Queen’s sword and shield. They could not find any way to scratch it, much less tear it apart. If it continued to expand, it would slowly but surely crush every single structure in Kingdom F like a giant bulldozer.

And would it stop with just this small Eastern European kingdom?

Why should they be optimistic enough to assume it would not cover all of Europe, obliterate all of Eurasia, and ultimately cross the oceans to reach every livable part of the planet?

And while everyone was focused on this new threat…

“Uuh.”
Someone groaned quietly while at an utter loss as to what to do.
That may have been no real surprise. To repeat, the cocoon gradually applying pressure to Kingdom F appeared to be a transformation of the Sword of Truth, which was the White Queen’s battle costume. Her clothes were there. So what did that mean for the Queen herself *while she looked up at it*?
The girl shrunk down, blushed, and covered her chest and hips with her arms.
The “White” Queen who Wields the Sword of Unsullied Truth (iu – nu – fb – a – wuh – ei –kx – eu – pl – vjz) was entirely nude.
The situation could not have been more abnormal.
The closest thing to clothing she had were the two hair ties she had found lying around. That allowed her to maintain her usual twintails.
She should have been in control of her battle costume, but it was continuing to expand without her. And yet that was not the strangest thing happening here. There was something fundamentally wrong when *the* White Queen was blushing, cowering on the ground, and covering her body like she wanted to disappear.
Even the gods feared that transcendent being, so the glory of her nudity should have actually made everyone else bow down before her.
She had no greater weapon than her beauty. She might show it off like the sun, but would she really feel the kind of embarrassment that led her to hide herself like this?
The absence of clothing was a trivial matter in this case.
It felt like the White Queen would have been cowering down like this even if she were fully equipped. It was like she wanted to vanish from view like a fading fog or mist.
And a woman stood next to the silver twintail girl.
She was Freedom Award 3000, World Complete.
Shigara Masami.
That summoner had passed the 1000 mark and shifted from this world to the other. The young woman used a scrunchie to wear her long black hair in a ponytail and she wore a lab coat over a tight skirt suit. However, she blew away all the implications of that outfit with the smile of a mischievous child.
And she placed a hand next to her mouth to whisper to the White Queen.
<That’s it. That’s exactly it. This looks promising, Queen. If you had let Kyousuke-kun see you with *that look on your face*, this may never have gotten so complicated☆>
“This is a first in the history of the world.”
The sun was hidden.
The White Queen growled with resentment while covering her radiant body with her arms.

“Shigara Masami. You are the very first intelligent being who was ever insolent and arrogant enough to make a fool of me, the White Queen, for your own enjoyment!!”
<Oh, dear. I wasn’t trying to get ahead of Kyousuke-kun and take one of your firsts for myself.>
It did not matter that she was blushing, tearful, naked, and fidgeting. Normally, the pressure rising from the Queen should have nearly crushed anyone’s soul, but Shigara Masami did not seem at all bothered as she stood there in her lab coat and tight skirt suit.
<You don’t need to worry about Kyousuke-kun or his friends. They were nearly hit by the cocoon during its explosive expansion, but I managed to protect them. And thanks to that, you don’t have to worry about anyone seeing you like this.>
She had been the true mastermind behind the Queen’s Miniature Garden, so she may have seen both Shiroyama Kyousuke and the White Queen as her students.
<So have you calmed down yet, Queen?>
“Hmph.”
The twintail girl childishly looked away while still covering her body with her arms.
It was an obvious rejection, but didn’t it seem like *an expression she had never let anyone else see* but in a different way from how she behaved around Kyousuke?
“Let us review the situation.”
<Sure.>
“First of all, I am having a hard time accepting what happened. Namely, that I was scolded by you and had my beloved brother taken from me. No matter how much my conscious mind tries to logically accept it, my subconscious pride will not allow it. That is how the heart works.”
Shigara Masami of course had no intention of stealing Kyousuke for herself. In fact, she had intervened to help those two get along.
<Are you saying that subconscious part of you is controlling that cocoon – the transformed version of your Sword of Truth?>
“The thing about that is…”
The White Queen started to point a finger at the cocoon expanding and growing in the distance, but she quickly stopped and pointed with her chin instead when she realized moving her arm left some things exposed.
“You could say that battle costume guarantees I am always right. That mass of violence will turn white to black or black to white for me. It normally changes form in response to my commands, but it is based on the ‘weapons which, when used by their rightful owner, will fly around and achieve victory all on their own’ which are found in Celtic, Norse, Alaskan, Japanese, and other mythologies. Although in this case, it is not bothering with choosing individual targets and likely intends to achieve victory by

destroying the entire world, eliminating all that is unnecessary, and remaking everything again."
<Can you not stop it?>
"At this point, I don't think my conscious or subconscious thoughts will change anything. It thinks for itself and will not allow anything to exist that would harm me. The rebellion against me in the Kingdom F area was just the starting point. Depending on how this plays out, it might *eliminate the entire world that would harm me*."
In the past, the White Queen had received the devotion of this world's people, bound the other world's Unexplored-classes with fear, and brought madness to all with thinking minds. But did her influence extend beyond that? Did even this inorganic weapon feel the need to bow down to her and present her with an offering?
When it came down to it, the White Queen did not care what happened as long as Shiroyama Kyousuke was safe.
The fate of the other 7 billion was none of her concern.
But if the Sword of Truth went berserk, it might kill Shiroyama Kyousuke as well since he had made himself her enemy. If the White Queen abandoned the 7 billion, even Shigara Masami would likely use her powerful defenses to keep her away. …And more importantly, she doubted Shiroyama Kyousuke would be happy in a thoroughly ruined world.
He was the kind of person who readily claimed that half the world's tragedies were his fault. Even though he could escape all that guilt by blaming 100% of it on the White Queen. He claimed he would use any kind of underhanded method to kill her, but he still felt a need to play fair. She adored that about him. To the point that she wanted to bully him to death.
The naked girl breathed a gentle sigh.
"Let's stop that cocoon's expansion," she said. "It is my possession after all."
<Very good. And that clothing is just an added bonus. Your bare arms should be the most powerful thing of all. Can't you just tear it apart?>
"How about you remind yourself who it was that psychologically stripped me of my power? I am not exactly at top form at the moment."
Of course, that did not mean she was weak in any sense of the word.
She was still the White Queen.
This was more an issue of instability, so she might blow up the entire dimension if she tried using her power now.
<…>
"You didn't think this through, did you? Besides, tearing that cocoon apart wouldn't do any good. Shigara Masami, are you aware of the tension problem with space elevators?"
<If the thick wire running from the surface to satellite orbit breaks for any reason, the massive tension is released, producing a large explosion, correct? It's hard to say anything for sure since no such elevator exists, but the theory is the force would rival that of a nuclear explosion.>

“As a cocoon, that is made from threads and it would produce even more force than that.”
<Oh.>
“Did you give this any thought at all!? Ahem. Anyway, that is the power that protects me. If it bursts in its current uncontrolled state, the best case scenario is a fireball large enough to fry the entire planet, but it might also produce enough gravity to create a black hole that swallows the entire solar system.”
<Um, if it will explode when it bursts, are you suggesting what I think you are?>
“It currently has a diameter of 5km, but if that passes 10km, it will collapse in on itself. And that leads straight to the aforementioned explosion. Of course, that is still nothing compared to what *the power inside me* would do if released.”
That meant destroying the cocoon was not an option.
It was enough of a miracle that it was contained there without allowing any of its power to leak out. Nothing could compare to the defenses of the Queen’s battle costume. Normal matter might have already produced more gravity than the sun, causing the earth to fold in on itself.
Plus…
“The cocoon is no more than the ignition. The true danger lies elsewhere.”
<That thing Kyousuke-kun created, you mean?>
“The Colorless Little Girl Dedicated to a Single Goal (aie – a – oio – ei – ueo – ioa – e – uai – ee).”
The White Queen spoke that name with emphasis on each individual word. The Queen did.
“If she is still functioning as a tool to kill me, then she will try to destroy all of me, including that cocoon. So *the larger the cocoon grows, the more power the Colorless Little Girl will store up*. I am more worried about that than the cocoon rupturing. If the cocoon and the Colorless Little Girl clash head on after growing to the limit, all life will be enveloped by endless flames and destroyed.”
<The Colorless Little Girl is the most dangerous while she wanders the two worlds in an instable state. Should I assume you are keeping yourself at a low level so as not to provoke her?>
“Yes.”
That led to only one conclusion.
“I must accept it.”
Those words brought a greater flush to the White Queen’s cheeks than having so much bare skin exposed to the outside air.
“Shigara Masami. I have no rebuttal to what you have said, so I must accept that you have taken my brother from me. And I must accept that the choice you have made is the best way to bring my brother and me together. I suppose you could call this a *journey to learn what it means to be human*. The Sword of Truth guarantees I am always right. It will continue to grow

endlessly and meaninglessly as long as there is something I cannot accept and it could trigger a supernova if its 5km diameter reaches 10km. But at the same time, if I can conquer my issues and prove you mean no harm, the cocoon will have no more need to act on my behalf. And stopping it should also stabilize the Colorless Little Girl who must be gathering power in response. …That is the only way to save this world and to save my brother who lives in it.”
That might sound simple enough, but the White Queen was the strongest being who existed beyond the Regulation-class, Divine-class, and Unexplored-class.
This was not like Norse or Greek Mythology where there were plenty of equally-powerful gods who could provide advice if one made a mistake. In other words, the entire world would have to change to match. If the White Queen listened to what Shigara Masami had to say, it would be the same as altering the very structure of the existing Third Style.
But she had to do it.
She did not care about herself and the 7 billion did not matter at all.
The White Queen was always focused on just the one person. That nude girl with the reflectively white skin would accept any indignity if it was for her beloved Shiroyama Kyousuke.
<I see, I see. The best possible ending for both Kyousuke-kun and the Queen? That does sound like the best focal point for you to accept this. In other words, for you to accept that *my intervention was a good thing and you were mistaken*.>
Tight skirt Shigara Masami nodded a few times and spoke like she was giving this a lot of thought, even if she was not really.
<So it might be best to pursue Shiroyama Kyousuke’s definition of happiness and unhappiness. He usually spends all his time criticizing you, but he is twisted in his own way.>
“Um, uh, I hesitate to say this…but isn’t that because I got a tad carried away at the Queen’s Miniature Garden?”
<Non.> The ponytail researcher rejected it with a single word. <It is true that the Queen’s Miniature Garden was a turning point for him, but that was not the starting point. Have you forgotten, Queen? Or have you overwritten your memories and impressions of it out of some form of guilt? When young Kyousuke-kun arrived at the Miniature Garden, he was already a precision guided missile that endlessly pursued a set target. And when you supposedly met him for the first time, you immediately called him *brother*.>
“…”
<That seems to be related to a project Doctor S pursued using his biological son, Kyousuke-kun. So unless you solve that mystery, you have yet to see his true roots. And without knowing the very foundation that formed him, you cannot see his definition of happiness. Isn’t that right?>

It was a lot like reading a 10-volume series of textbooks by starting with the 3rd volume. No matter how much work you did from there, you could not hope to understand it without the foundational knowledge of the 1st volume. Nothing you learned would do you any good.
Any attempt would go to waste.
No matter how hard she sought him, they would only misunderstand each other.
“That…isn’t a bad idea,” said the naked silver-haired girl. “*A journey to learn what it means to be human?* At the very least, it sounds better than staying in this irrelevant little kingdom. My brother needs to be at the center of my universe.”
<To be fair, Kingdom F’s national character is rooted in you.>
Regardless.
She knew young Shiroyama Kyousuke had been given some kind of gifted education by his biological father who was now known as Doctor S. And that education had occurred at an ordinary home instead of a special research facility like the Queen’s Miniature Garden.
She knew that home was somewhere in Japan.
But where exactly?
This was the same problem as ordinary kitchen knives being harder to trace than police batons and stun guns that required going through special channels to purchase. This home could be anywhere, so it was hard to narrow things down.
Shiroyama Kyousuke said he could not remember what his mother or *little sister* looked like.
But it was different from simple memory loss.
On that day and in that place, the White Queen had done something which had erased and blown away the world’s data. So it was not just that Kyousuke did not remember. Not one of the 7 billion people on this planet could provide that information.
The White Queen was involved in half of the world’s mysteries.
The nude twintail girl sighed.
“Shigara Masami.”
<Let’s do this the old-fashioned way. Queen, we win if you can resolve your problems before the cocoon reaches its 10km limit and before the Colorless Little Girl goes berserk.>
The White Queen seemed to be placing someone else in control and listening to the lesson they had for her.
Shigara Masami looked so calm in this situation, but that was due to the great skill backing up her confidence.
The next stage would be Japan.
It was time to begin her journey to understand Shiroyama Kyousuke and *what it means to be human.*
And on top of that…

<Now, Queen, I'm afraid I must ask you to stay by my side. You know what I mean, don't you?>
"?"
<Oh. It's actually even more dangerous if you aren't aware of it.>
Shigara Masami placed a hand on her forehead and shook her head in a somewhat exaggerated fashion.
And she continued speaking.
<What I mean is, you can't support your own presence here right now, can you?>
There was a staticky sound, but it did not come from Shigara Masami's voice.
The White Queen's alluring curves blurred. At some points, they grew jagged. At some points, they were swallowed by a gray sandstorm. She was losing her stability in this world.
Only then did she realize what was happening.
In the Blood-Sign System, the supernatural beings known as Materials could only remain in this world while an Artificial Sacred Ground had been established by an Incense Grenade. The White Queen had only been able to ignore that rule at times because of the irregular permanent summonings her worshipers had sacrificed themselves to perform.
That support had collapsed.
And that meant just one thing.
<With you and the Colorless Little Girl, the top of the Third Style and Fourth Style have risen to the forefront. I am sure there are plenty of people working to return you to your former glory even after your intentional defeat.>
"…"
<However, things are starting to change. Queen, your age is coming to an end. Once you fail to maintain your charisma and your number of worshipers dwindles, you will be unable to make so many absurd demands. You will find it harder and harder to force the sacrifices needed to maintain a permanent summoning.>
"That does make sense."
Shigara Masami had kept her voice low as she reported the severity of the situation, but the White Queen had let go of that throne because it was too much of a bother. She would hide in the Colorless Little Girl's shadow and stay with Shiroyama Kyousuke. This was no time to be worried about a decline in reputation.
Shigara Masami sighed in her suit and lab coat.
<That is why I must ask you to remain by my side. More specifically, I will let you piggy-back off of the conversation and long-term summoning unit that is supporting me. Or as the device is commonly known, a Box.>
"Hm? How did you manage that???"

<Kyousuke-kun and Biondetta-chan were not the only survivors of the Secret War at the Queen's Miniature Garden. And I receive an emotion similar to worship from them☆>
Anyone who had survived that extreme war would have grown into quite a fierce warrior. Even so, a Box required a number of sacrifices. There were plenty of examples, including the Anthill Project the vessel named Isabelle had been involved in or Pandemonium secretly run by the Deltaston family. Shigara Masami herself had worked to stop some of them, yet here she was using one.
And at the same time, if you viewed it from a different angle, it was a major gamble on Shigara Masami's part to throw the White Queen back at those warriors of the Miniature Garden after they had regained their sanity. After all, this was a repeat of the past. The introduction of the White Queen had gradually driven that underground lab insane, so the same thing could always happen again.
<This time.>
However…
Because it was a repeat…
<This time, I will guide you and Kyousuke-kun in the right direction. That is the only ending that I…no, *we* will accept. For one thing, if we adults had done things right the first time around, you would not have had to fight through those Unexplored-classes even if it meant breaking your promise and Kyousuke-kun would not have had to race down the path of revenge for those who were lost.>
"…"
The silver twintail girl remained silent for a while.
Like she was assessing something.
Finally, she took a step into Shigara Masami's personal space. And she leaned her naked shoulder against the woman.
The static vanished and she regained her stability.
Shigara Masami had apparently earned a passing score.
Then the transcendent being spoke under her breath while childishly pouting her lips.
"If it will help brother."
<Yes, Queen. That is all you need to consider. No matter what emotions you feel along the way, you must not forget what lies at the foundation of it all.>
"Shigara Masami."
<Yes?>
The White Queen winked.
"I get it, so just give me something to wear already."

Sinceria Report 01

“Down with the Queen!!”
“Don’t be left behind by the times! We need to push through to the future!!”
“We can’t afford to fall back by a century! Kill the White Queen!!”
Just closing her eyes was enough to imagine the angry shouts and screams and picture the placards and burning paintings. If anything, the White Queen was her enemy, but the shouts of “down with the Queen” still got to her. They were not directed at her, but she still felt a squeezing at her heart.
Sinceria Highland was the ruler of Kingdom F.
She was a young woman with long, fluffy blonde hair, white skin, and curvy bodylines, but her most notable feature was her long and pointed ears. It was rumored she had left the realm of humanity and taken a step into the devilish beauty of a Material because she had made more contracts than anyone else in history. There were many summoners in the ranks of Kingdom F’s knights and she always partnered herself with the most powerful of them, so it was not surprising that such rumors existed.
But at the moment, she was dressed in a way not at all suitable for a skilled vessel or the ruler of a kingdom.
She was in a swimsuit.
It was a blue one-piece that covered most everything, but there was no hiding her figure. Clichéd descriptions of large breasts and long legs did not do her justice. Instead of being sexy because of a special outfit, she was sexy no matter what she wore.
This was South America’s Devil’s Island.
There were different kinds of beauty, but Sinceria’s was an extreme variety reminiscent of snow and ice. When that ruler, who currently wore a swimsuit with a ribbon at the chest, stood nearby, she created an illusion that the temperature had dropped by 2 or 3 degrees even on the sunny beach.
She had a good reason for visiting this palm tree island bearing the name of the devil.
“It isn’t everyday a penal colony receives a guest.”
A beach chair and parasol were set up on the white sandy beach. A cold drink sat on the side table. More than just pouring in a chilled liquid, the glass itself was ice cold. All of that was managed by an old butler who wore a black suit despite the sun beating down on him.

And at the center of it all was a young girl with reddish-blonde ringlet curls. Azalea Magentarain was lying there.
She was wearing a blue bikini. The white border increased its cuteness. She did not at all look like someone who was currently imprisoned. But Sinceria was a true monarch, so she was used to that sort of luxury. And this was not the time to let it overwhelm her. That cocoon was expanding even now. To stop it before it crossed Kingdom F's border and crushed the people's homes and possessions, she had to gather information from this summoner girl who was a former weapons designer for Quad Motors and had made her way deep into a group of White Queen worshipers.
"I arranged a meeting through Government. Do you mind if we speak?"
"Not at all. But we should finish this before Claude notices. Your body is too dangerous to have any gentlemen around. Would you like something to drink?"
"Hee hee. I think I'm in the mood for something nonalcoholic. To feel like I'm young again. Hyah☆"
Sinceria shrieked when cold water found its way into her ample cleavage after dripping from the bottom of the cocktail glass she was handed. Azalea responded far too calmly when she saw that.
"Yes, it really is dangerous. I need to keep Claude away from you."
"Oh, are you referring to the one-armed man with an eyepatch? I believe Rachel is chasing him around with her battle hook. She said something about leering at the swimsuit of Kingdom F's ruler qualifying as lese majeste."
"Already!? Do I not even get a chance to react!? I was wondering what he was up to after ignoring my fantastic swimsuit and going clamming! I can't believe him!!!!!"
Sinceria had a single question.
She wanted to know what the White Queen would do next.
She had a nearly accurate grasp of the connection between the cocoon growing at Kingdom F's border and the Colorless Little Girl. Her daughter, Olivia, had helped a lot with information on the Colorless Little Girl. The Colorless Little Girl was the greatest threat, but they had to do something about the cocoon if they were to stop her. And that cocoon was originally a part of the White Queen.
According to a Government researcher named Maria Heartocean, the 5km cocoon's limit was 10km. If it grew beyond that, there was a risk of a supernova-level explosion. And the Colorless Little Girl would likely take action before that. That would begin the worst possible chain reaction where *a fierce explosive blast was used to prevent an explosion.*
But whatever the case.
Whatever the case, Sinceria had to protect the people of Kingdom F.
But if she let that obvious impatience show, she knew she would be forced to accept demands she would rather not accept.
"Ahem. This should go without saying."

A noble was no match for a royal.
But Azalea had not lost a hint of her shine. That was proof that she was not just coasting on her bloodline. Sinceria had failed to elope with the man she had fallen for, so she was honestly envious of the girl's grounded lifestyle.
Azalea sat up on the beach chair and crossed her slender legs as she started speaking.
"There is only one thing in Her Majesty's heart: Shiroyama Kyousuke. From beginning to end, everything she does is centered on that summoner. And that remains true whether it is based in love or hate. The reason Shiroyama Kyousuke stays ahead of everyone else when it comes to her is quite simple. He just has to ask his own heart what she will do. No amount of resources and personnel and not even the greatest supercomputer can compare to that."
"Well, I would very much like to have Kyousuke fighting to protect Kingdom F, but it seems he took quite a psychological shock this time."
"You're looking at this wrong."
Azalea toyed with the strap on her hip and sharply corrected Sinceria.
She was a crazed believer being imprisoned for her brutal crimes. She might appear cooperative, but from what viewpoint was she discussing the White Queen? Once someone had been corrupted by the Queen, was it possible for them to ever fully recover? Sinceria very much wanted to know the answer to that question since her daughter, Olivia, had worked with Doctor S for a time.
This girl's age and stature both reminded her of her daughter.
And the fact that her daughter might have ended up like this if she had made one wrong move or Shiroyama Kyousuke had not worked to solve the situation.
(As a mother, I would really like to know.)
"How am I looking at this wrong? We are monitoring Kyousuke's condition from multiple sources. And personally, I think this seems like the best time."
Sinceria was a mother, a ruler, and a woman.
When she spoke, she often switched between those three different sides of herself. It went without saying what a three-faced goddess like Hecate symbolized. Yes, Sinceria stood at the peak of the feminine identity and she also ruled her kingdom on the occult side by using the Blood-Sign System.
Meanwhile, Azalea treated her like a mere guest.
It was a confrontation between the occult and the military industrial complex.
"In this case, it doesn't matter whether Shiroyama Kyousuke actively does anything or not. He has given up on fighting and is falling behind, so why hasn't Her Majesty abducted him yet? What could be more important than Shiroyama Kyousuke just lying there waiting to be attacked? What could it possibly be???"
"…"

“Just to drive the point home, you ruler of a fairy tale kingdom, she has nothing beyond Shiroyama Kyousuke. So she would never leave him be and focus on something else. *That means there must be something she wants to do for his sake even if it means leaving him be for now.* So this must be a rather unique situation.”
“I see. That does explain it.”
“And when someone has lost interest in the present, there aren’t many other options. There is a fair amount of risk in speaking about her thoughts on a human level, but isn’t it worth considering?”

Facts

- White Queen learned Embarrassment!!
- The Sword of Truth, the White Queen's battle uniform, has the divine power to guarantee she is always right even if that means turning white into black or vice versa. It normally obeys her commands, but it is essentially an item that automatically fights to bring her victory.
- The cocoon currently has a diameter of 5km. If it grows to 10km, it might produce a supernova-level explosion. But the bigger threat is the Colorless Little Girl who is storing up power to match the cocoon.
- To prevent that path to ruin, the White Queen must accept Shigara Masami, a lower being. Can she believe that the woman is working toward the best interests of both Shiroyama Kyousuke and the Queen? To accomplish this, she must go on a journey to discover what it means to be human. On this journey, she will investigate Shiroyama Kyousuke's roots and what happiness means to him. If she fails, the world is doomed.
- Shigara Masami receives an emotion similar to worship from those who survived the Secret War. She is supported by a long-term summoning Box and she has invited the White Queen into that Box despite the risk.
- Shiroyama Kyousuke was a precision-guided missile before arriving at the Miniature Garden and the White Queen immediately referred to him as "brother" when they supposedly first met. Thus, their roots predate the Miniature Garden.
- Kyousuke does not remember his mother or his *little sister*. But this is not just memory loss. At some point in the past, the White Queen's destruction erased some of the world's data.

Stage 01: A World of Ruin Indulges in Chaos

“Are you ready now?”
“Yes.”
(Stage 01 Open 08/21 09:00)
A World of Ruin Indulges in Chaos

Part 1

Down with the Queen.
Most of the people populating this planet would have no idea what that phrase meant. Even so, it eerily began spreading on its own. People used it when they wanted to gather attention on a video sharing site. It appeared as a social media hashtag. It was the name of a famous artist's song or the theme for their concert tour. It was given impressive renderings as spray-painted wall art. It even covered the placards and banners carried by the protestors filling the streets.
However.
Unsurprisingly…
"Wow, they're really running with that, aren't they?"
On the top floor of a luxury apartment in Toy Dream 35, the swimsuit girl named Aika was being very unkind to the planet by keeping the air conditioning at 19 degrees despite the midsummer heat outside. She used her 5m white liger as a sofa while she commented on the commotion which had even more of a presence than the cicadas crying outside the windows. The tablet she held was linked to a projector that displayed some footage over the entire ceiling. But the deep rumbling could not be explained by the audio and video of some online news.
These protests were not isolated to the screen.
If she opened the curtains, she would find thousands or even tens of thousands of people participating in protests – no, they were riots at this point – within Toy Dream 35.
On the video chat, the modified China dress beauty named Lu Niang Lan spoke with exasperation in her voice.
"None of them can even know who they mean by 'the Queen', but they're still wasting their summer break on this. Those normal people have never even heard of the Blood-Sign Summoning Ceremony, so who do they think they're mad at?"
"There is such a thing as anger without an outlet and anxiety without a cause."
"Is that any reason to attack pawnshops and prize exchange shops? And a few Illegal front shops have been destroyed in the process! That's a huge problem!!"

“Invisible anxieties take aim at the weakest points and eventually lead to financial exploitation. Just like the victims of the witch hunts who had all their assets seized.”
The white and green striped bikini girl kept a dry attitude at times like this. She could not function as a Government intermediary otherwise.
People tended to think scientism, realism, and atheism were relatively widespread in Japan, but *remnants* of older beliefs were actually quite common. Many common idioms and phrases originally referred to mythical creatures and the fortunetellers who stared at a crystal ball while performing a cold reading to draw out their customer’s worries had only been replaced by AI speakers and big data. Despite claiming to be skeptics of everything, they had carried over quite a lot by simply changing the box they put it in. Truth could be found in lies, but the opposite was also possible. This country’s darkness had not been illuminated enough for the mystical to have no hold on the people there.
Mythology and religion could shake them far deeper than they thought and without them even noticing. Normal people had no way of knowing about the opposition between the White Queen and the Colorless Little Girl, but the vague anxiety and fear had reached them. And because they did not know the identity of that internal pressure even as it passed its limit, they made bizarre actions as a way of protecting their own minds. Just like the popular question of what someone would do if they knew the world would end tomorrow.
But what about the real summoners and vessels who knew about the Blood-Sign System?
Did knowledge of the truth help them keep their cool?
The answer was no.
In fact, it may have been even worse.
As if to say there were some things you were better off not knowing.
“But is this any time to just watch it happen?” asked Lu Niang Lan.
“Government is supposed to preserve order, so shouldn’t this be an even bigger problem for you?”
“To be honest, Government is an organization for protecting and punishing people. When the White Queen or Colorless Little Girl *themselves* are directly involved, it’s mostly outside of our control.”
“This is centered on him, isn’t it?”
“It is,” confirmed Aika while retying the side strap on her hip that had a habit of coming loose if she was not paying attention.
There would be no solution unless Shiroyama Kyousuke took action instead of rotting away in his cruiser.
However.
“Would Kyousuke-chan even listen if someone said ‘help me’ right now? I mean, it’s really a miracle he never broke before this. The world was far too reliant on his good will.”

“Heh. Looks like this job is too much for the wet gunpowder that is some old lady’s seduction. If you want to trigger a response, you need to send in the cute little sister.”
“I’m going to let that one slide, but how does a year-round shut-in expect to go outside?”
“Mhn.”
With a grunt of effort, the swimsuit girl pulled out a stuffed doll with cartoonish proportions. The doll had unique twintails made by tying a braid into a loop on either side of its head, it only wore a striped bikini, and it was packed full of enough tech to walk upright in response to instructions from a tablet.
“I call it the Pretty Aika-chan Doll. You can even change its clothes. Now I can leave the apartment just fine as a shut-in, so Onii-chan will never again have to spend a night alone.”
“If this actually works, I will be seriously concerned about Kyousuke-chan’s future.”

Part 2

It had begun as disbelief.
If he accused her of betraying him, would he be neglecting to consider her feelings? After all, he had never been given any kind of guarantee that Shigara Masami would unconditionally take his side.
"…"
Inside a cruiser moored at the yacht harbor at the bottom level of Toy Dream 35, Shiroyama Kyousuke lay motionless on his own double bed. While so close to the water, the cries of the seagulls were louder than the cicada chorus. But a cacophony loud enough to forcibly mix everything up might have been better here.
A heavy gloom hung over the cruiser.
(Even at her level…)
He had seen a portion of Shigara Masami's humanity and skill at the Queen's Miniature Garden. If what he had later experienced through the Yellow Gills was true, then she was Freedom Award 3000, placing her far above Shiroyama Kyousuke's Award 903 position.
And yet…
Yes, and yet…
(Even a summoner at her level can be distorted like that? The White Queen's powerful influence will even violate a mind on that level?)
Isn't it for the best if there are no more victims? If you can reconcile your differences, isn't it more productive to take advantage of this opportunity? The world should be filled with love and peace, so it's obviously better to eliminate all conflict. Now, Kyousuke-kun, go make up with her and take the cutest and strongest White Queen for yourself. What could be better than that?☆
Really?
Was that really what the researcher was thinking?
"That can't be right."
Kyousuke could not go anywhere, so he simply groaned to himself.
Too many unwanted thoughts came to mind when he simply closed his eyes. What about the tragedy at the Queen's Miniature Garden? Or the civil war in Kingdom F? And he did not need to stick to the past. The White Queen was currently dragging so many people into this mess, including Meinokawa Renge and Higan.
"That can't possibly be right."

All’s well that ends well.
Could he really just brush it all off to have a happy ending? After everything that happened? She had done such horrific things. Could he really accept it just because Shigara Masami, one of the victims of the Queen’s Miniature Garden, had reappeared and said she did not mind? He had to stay true to himself and stand firm. The White Queen had caused half the world’s tragedies and Shiroyama Kyousuke was connected to the other half. He could not forget that. No matter who tried to offer him forgiveness.
The cocoon and the Colorless Little Girl were of secondary importance. The White Queen was the root cause of it all, so killing her would solve everything. He could not look away from that answer.
He could not seek a happy ending just for him and his friends.
He could not lose momentum, stop before reaching the finish line, and decide that was “close enough”.
“Heyyy.”
A girl with long silver hair approached Kyousuke who was acting like his batteries had died. She looked just like the White Queen, but a close look would reveal some differences. For example, that white girl would never have worn a black bikini.
This was Meinokawa Aoi.
She was the Meinokawa Shrine’s secret object of worship and a Joruri Method vessel made to look just like the White Queen. She childishly pouted her lips and raised her voice louder than the cicadas.
“I don’t like this bait. I mean, I come from the mountains, so I’m used to small prawns and sliced wieners! I can’t bring myself to touch these wriggling ragworms and eunicids! Bait the hook for me, boy!!”
“…”
“Are you even listening? Oryah!!”

He heard a shout and then the blanket rose up at the foot of the bed. Bikini Aoi must have dived in headfirst like she was sticking her head into a tunnel. The area below the blanket was immediately filled with a warmth that could not be explained by Kyousuke's body heat alone. No matter what she looked like, she was still an old lady on the inside, so she did not seem to have an issue with getting so close to a teenage boy.
"Hmm, sniff sniff. It smells strongly of boy in here."
Aoi crawled ever upwards and ultimately stuck her head out from the blanket by Kyousuke's face. And she raised her voice while looking him in the eye.
"Bwah! Anyway, do the bait! I can't fish without new bait on the hook, so fix it, boy!!"
(Not even someone at Shigara Masami's level could fight it.)
This was not enough to get a response from Kyousuke.
In fact, the more obvious a smile she gave him, the deeper he sank into his own thoughts.
He poked at the phone on the side table to check the time and found there were no missed calls. When a summoner or vessel had reached a certain Award level, they vanished from normal people's memories and awareness when not in their direct line of sight. It was obvious, but that too was an issue of the rules. It was a part of the Blood-Sign rules, so there was no fighting it. That was just more proof of how easily people's minds could be influenced.
And the White Queen stood at the peak of the Summoning Ceremony.
To repeat, people's minds were easily influenced.
(Then what about everyone else? What's the point of anything I've done? I saved them because they asked for help, but if their definition of happiness can be distorted by the white, then what do the words "help me" even mean???)
"……
……"
"Wahyah?"
Zoning out turned out to be a bad idea.
While still lost in thought, old habits moved his body. Specifically, he placed a hand on Meinokawa Aoi's silver-haired head and stroked it as if soothing a small child.
"W-wait, this is not what I asked for! The bait! I only wanted you to bait the hook! Ahh, yes. Right there. Gently massage my scalp…ah!? W-w-wait, no, I need to resist!!"
That was not enough to silence her, so Kyousuke picked Aoi up and carried her to the bath.
While he used shampoo to roughly work up a lather on her head, the world's oldest Joruri Method finally realized what was going on.

“Hold it! I think I’ve figured this out! You don’t know who I am, do you!? Wake up! I might look the same, but I am not the White Queen!! You really do have a hard time separating love from hate, don’t you!? What a pain!!”
“…”
She may have been lucky her black bikini was a little trickier than average. Otherwise, he might have stripped off her clothes before placing her in the bath based on his autopilot programmed at the Miniature Garden. From beginning to end, Kyousuke never really looked at Aoi. He stared into the distance while washing the bubbles away with warm water from the showerhead. Then he left the shower room on his own and collapsed right back into the double bed. It all looked like someone mindlessly constructing boxes on a conveyer belt.
The Joruri Method looked a bit dissatisfied at not being given any conditioner or hair treatment, but she still left the bath and placed a towel over her head.
She looked down at the empty shell of a summoner and breathed an exasperated sigh.
“He has it really bad.”
Shut up.

Part 3

It was a surprising blind spot.
“I never thought I would be able to work part-time at school.”
Braided and bespectacled Librarian-chan spoke her soul.
Ever-expanding cumulonimbus clouds floated in an otherwise clear blue sky. Due to all the bushes and trees growing on the school grounds, the noisy cicadas were out in full force.
August was approaching its end, but summer break was not over yet. And lately, schools had begun opening themselves up to the public after school to provide communication opportunities outside of studying. As an extension of that, this was naturally the most popular part of the school during the summer.
The pool had been opened up.
“Yes, yes. That’s dangerous, so please stop it. Fwee, fwee, fwee, fwee!! Stop lining up the kickboards to try to run across the water! I said stop it!!”
Why was Librarian-chan sitting in the lifeguard seat blowing on a whistle when she was not all that good a swimmer herself? Because she was Librarian-chan. A close observation of the pool would show boys and girls in non-school swimsuits holding waterproof packages made of thick plastic. They were book covers designed for reading in the bath.
(I know it’s a campaign to increase the reading rate during midsummer, but I still don’t like bringing paper anywhere near the water.)
In her dark blue swimsuit, Librarian-chan grumbled in her heart. This was originally a library-led event, not a pool event. During summer break, the only thing the school library had going for it was the quiet and the air conditioning. But it was a cruel world out there and everything needed some way of drawing in users.
So…
“Oh, Librarian-chan? Are you so straight-laced you wear the boring old school swimsuit at an event like this? Wow.”
“Oh, god. Why did I have to run into a classmate on the job!? This is hell!!”
“The customer is your god, so you’d damn well better treat me with care.”
The classmate was Rendou Akiya(♂). The odds of running into a classmate were likely higher than at a normal job since this one used a school facility. But that did not mean she had to like it. This classmate had his chestnut hair tied back and normally wore a girl’s uniform as a fashion statement, but today he wore a bright yellow two-piece swimsuit that used frilly cloth

to subtly hide the shape of the chest and hips. And wasn't that swimsuit the hot new product from Wet & Smith!?
"Also, a form-fitting school swimsuit really only works with a flat chest or giant tits. You can't draw out the true charm of a school swimsuit with average proportions."
"Well, you talk like a boy if nothing else."
"Just look at the Student Council President! See how the threads holding on that 'Benikomichi Fuuki' nametag are straining and about to burst? Now that's how you do a high schooler's school swimsuit! Hell yeah!!"
"Wait, why is she forcing that excessively curvy body into a school swimsuit!? And that nametag is written in hiragana like it was written by an elementary school kid! That just makes it look indecent!!"
And speaking of nametags…
"Hey, Librarian-chan, what's that on your swimsuit's nametag? Some kind of nickname???"
"It's my real name! Who would write 'Librarian' on here!?"
Librarian-chan sighed at that person whose bodylines somehow still looked feminine in a swimsuit.
"I really don't want to pursue this too far, but which locker room did you use?"
"Do you take me for a fool, average girl? I only dress this way as a fashion statement, so I'm not going to use my appearance to shamelessly satisfy my love of peeping."
Did this mean that someone who looked that pretty (she hated to admit it, but that guy looked more feminine than she did!!) had marched into the boy's locker room, stripped off his clothes, and changed into that swimsuit?
While battling this harsh reality in her school-approved swimsuit, Librarian-chan was worried that him using the boy's locker room would cause just as much chaos as the opposite. And as the part-time lifeguard, it was her duty to preserve the peace of this small slice of the world.
"You can't get in the pool without borrowing a book, so what do you want to read?"
"100 Simple Snacks Made With Pancake Mix."
"…"
Just how high were his femininity points?
The readings were so high he was reaching the level of a young wife.
Fixing a bento out of necessity was one thing, but these snacks were an extra luxury. Not even a serious(?) girl like Librarian-chan went for handmade food. In an age when you could get decent coffee and donuts at any convenience store, why would anyone need to work with pancake mix?
These thoughts were rapidly draining away the braided glasses girl's femininity points, but she seemed oblivious of the severity of her situation.
"Well, take your time and relax. I hope this cookbook will come in handy for you. Yes, I hope the combination of sugar, flour, and lots and lots of

femininity points will shatter the pride of girls all over the city. Gwa ha ha ha!”
“Y’know, we went to the same middle school, but do you have an older sister? This summer I met someone with the same family name as your nametag.”
“What!? Wait just a second! Are you making those snacks to hit on my sister? You have to be joking! I can’t imagine anything more awkward than the possibility of a family member and a classmate dating!!”
This was a very serious issue.
Librarian-chan frantically leaned out from the lifeguard seat in her school swimsuit, but she was unable to get to the bottom of the matter.
She was interrupted by a deep tremor. It came from awfully close by and was not at all something from a normal school life.

Part 4

Toy Dream 35 was made up of countless skyscrapers rising from the ocean and countless giant bridges that connecting those buildings. This was a large midair garden about as wide as a train station plaza or a small park.
The August sun shined brightly.
White cumulonimbus clouds floated overhead.
But despite that cheerful scene, the world on the surface was endlessly gloomy.
“Where’s the commotion this time?”
“Right next to Club Resistance in R Block. Are you kidding me? That’s Illegal’s turf!!”
The modified China dress beauty named Lu Niang Lan shouted in annoyance to answer the transmission from shut-in girl Aika. Since she was sharing this information with Government, she likely intended to remove all equipment from this facility and abandon it now that this commotion had drawn too much attention. A criminal organization like Illegal worked best when hidden.
This facility had been built in the same block as so many schools in order to function as a “gateway club”. It found new recruits by getting the good students to stop by after school, give them a taste of the spoils of illicit activities, and have them drop out. The underworld could not function if the organizations were nothing but muscular mohawked men. That type would drop out on their own and every industry wanted the genius boys and genius girls who were at the top of their class.
But in this case, there was a more important issue.
“Club Resistance has lots of communication equipment which is officially for streaming online concerts. Summoners and vessels have difficulty with the internet since normal people forget about us when we aren’t in their line of sight, right? So nothing we post gets a response. Renting online videos which only requires interacting with another machine is fine, but orders from online stores that require people to pack them up and ship them out will be completely forgotten. That’s why we use intermediaries who have stayed at less than Award 100.”
“Ugh, as a veteran shut-in, I know exactly what you mean. Illegal might be the enemy, but you have my sympathy. What do we have left if you take our network from us?”

“Illegal’s dark web communication bases are convenient, but they double as archives due to all the data that naturally gathers there. Even gathering up all the temporary files would provide a lot of data. Especially when it comes to data sources related to the Summoning Ceremony and Materials.”
“Meaning?”
“This is another side effect of this age of chaos. Someone is probably demanding all the data we have on the White Queen and the Colorless Little Girl. Toh!!’
She stopped speaking, swished the bottom of her modified China dress around, placed a hand on the bridge railing, and immediately jumped out into empty air. She was about 150m above the ocean surface, but there was no need to calculate that out. Not all of the bridges were at the same height. They crossed over each other in a complex three-dimensional arrangement, so she had only jumped down onto one a level lower.
That placed her right in front of Club Resistance.
She did not take her time to land, prepare, and then attack the enemy.
She did it all in one flowing motion. She placed her legs on the shoulders of the man she was attacking, squeezed his neck, and then made a vertical half rotation. With a windmill-like movement, she slammed the top of his head against the asphalt floor.
The shaking sent cicadas flying from a nearby roadside tree.
“Bwah!?”
She was now below a mist sprayer to provide some relief from the heat.
She did not bother introducing herself to the vessel girl who was unsure what to do now that her summoner had been taken out so quickly.
Without the Summoning Ceremony, the vessel was no more than a human.
The girl tried to pull a handgun from her hip *like it was the natural thing to do*.
But with her palms still pressed against the ground, the modified China dress beauty spun herself around like she was breakdancing. This time, she made a horizontal rotation. The vessel just barely managed to jump back to keep her slender legs out of reach and she pulled the trigger, but a dull impact hit the side of her head.
The artificial mist was swept several meters to the side.
Lu Niang Lan had used a Saryuda.
That was a binding tool made by attaching anchor-like clasps to the end of a metal chain. Instead of swinging it around to grab at a fleeing opponent’s clothing, she used it to extend the reach of her spinning kick.
It only took the one hit.
The blow from the side shifted the handgun’s aim, so the bullet blew a hole in the mist sprayer’s water pipe instead of Lu Niang Lan.
With a low watery gurgle, a puddle quickly formed.
The vessel girl collapsed to the side without as much as a scream. Lu Niang Lan sighed while returning the metal chain to her modified China dress so smoothly it looked like a snake moving on its own.

“Hey, you walking obscenity,” cut in Aika.
“My bodylines are a thing of beauty, so I have no problem showing them off.”
“Even when people can see the outlines of all the secret toys hidden under your clothes?”

“Oh, how indecent of me. And I call myself the Perfect Dragon?”
That woman primarily carried items that would violate the Swords and Firearms Control Law, so she finally started worrying about her silhouette and pinched and tugged at her modified China dress. By placing some air in between, she could hide what she was carrying within. She continued the effort while using her long leg to lightly kick the vessel’s head so she would face the other way. The girl would have drowned in the puddle otherwise.
Lu Niang Lan stopped at knocking them out.
She had a reason for not killing them right here and now.
She brushed up her bangs which looked even more charming while wet.
“I was worried we were leaking information from the dark web communication base, but I was wrong. It looks like this mess was entirely contained to Illegal even though we’re the ones who are supposed to be protecting Club Resistance.”
“Why were those scum interested in a nearby high school?”
“We were leeching off of a nearby public facility because we were afraid someone would notice the large server from the power consumption, but that didn’t work out so well.”
Neither did the enemy’s plan.
They were only after the data, but they did not cleverly make a cyber-attack from some remote location. Nor did they sneak in and swap out a ROM for one with their own malware on it. They had simply planned to blow open a wall, march into the facility, and directly steal a server blade or storage device. But they had been confused by the power leeching and decided to attack the school that had none of the data they wanted.
That just made it look like they were trying to cause as much damage and bloodshed as possible.
“Down with the Queen.”
Lu Niang Lan saw bloodshot eyes and heard a voice.
But it was hard to explain exactly who they belonged to. Several summoners raised their voices at once.
“Where is the Queeee

Back when superstitions were spreading that the tail of Halley's Comet would rob the earth of all its oxygen, people had apparently fought over rubber tire tubes in their desperation for air. During the oil shock when people believed the oil would dry up before long, products like gasoline, lamp oil, and even toilet paper had vanished from store shelves.
Unlike the normal people on the streets, summoners and vessels understood what the White Queen was. But that only brought more anxiety and fear. There were delusions one could only have when you had some but not all information on something.
How many people on the planet truly understood the White Queen?
Did anyone understand her more than Shiroyama Kyousuke, creator of the Colorless Little Girl?
That was why the professional summoners and vessels *who thought they understood* were actually the most dangerous. Just like the fools who saw something they should not have, their minds would break. Just like lunatics who mistakenly thought their minds were being influenced by invisible transmissions from space.
Those rioters approached as a single mass while smashing through everything in their way: a large bucket, a glass window, a car, and a planter. A frightened white cat bristled its fur, but they did not care it was a living creature in their path.
However…
"Pipe down, all of you."
Something large and white stole away a summoner from the side.
It was not a Material.
That 5m beast was a white liger who functioned as an animal vessel.
Perhaps to provide instructions, the cartoonish Aika-chan doll rode on the creature's back. The four-legged beast held her prey in her mouth lightly enough to keep him alive. She shook her head to swing him around before tossing the poor summoner off of the giant bridge.
The white cat mewed up at her, so the 5m white liger glanced down at it just once before moving on.
Real professionals would make the effort to maintain their sanity, so there was no need to sympathize with the summoners and vessels who had given up on that and joined the frenzy. They had failed to use their knowledge to erase their fear. Powerless normal people were one thing, but other professionals could be criticized for their insufficient effort. It was the same as Halley's Comet, the oil shock, Nostradamus, the Mayan calendar, and the AI uprising. Amateurs could be forgiven, but the experts had to keep a cool head.
Because the qualifications of an expert gave them a greater influence and ability to cause harm.
"Since I'm from Government, I honestly couldn't care less what happens to Illegal facilities and personnel, but there are quite a few schools in R Block.

Government must uphold the principles of love and justice, so we can't have anyone getting carried away and summoning a Material there."
"How about you try saying that when you're not releasing a 5m animal near those schools without a leash or collar, circus girl?"
The black-haired beauty gave that annoyed response while a bit bothered by how her China dress clung to her skin thanks to the mist sprayer and its broken pipe. Maybe doing things like this *for everyone's sake* was just the Government way of thinking.
"Actually, aren't there an awful lot of kids around here for summer break?" she asked.
"That high school was designated a wide-area evacuation point. If anything happens, the nearby residents will gather there."
The modified China dress beauty held a hand to her cheek when she heard that.
"Just so you know, I'm not going to wave a little flag at the intersection to help all the kids find their way."
"Liar. Everyone knows delinquents have a soft spot for lost children and kittens in the rain."
Even during summer break, the schools in the area were not necessarily deserted.
Even the Original Series at Cost 1 would be too much for a normal person. Not even a gun or a metal door would protect you from them.
"The basic plan is to individually defeat the rogue summoner-vessel pairs before they can summon a Material."
"What if we don't manage it in time?" asked Aika. "The target will vanish from my video footage if they open an Artificial Sacred Ground."
That was when they heard a reinforced concrete bridge creaking. But not because the number of gathered rioters had exceeded its weight limit.
It came from a different bridge a few dozen meters away.
A cubic area of the world had already been cut away and a scaly otherworldly being planted its four legs on that artificial land and opened its mighty jaws.
The Material itself could not leave the Artificial Sacred Ground, but the same did not apply to additional objects and projectiles like lightning or dragon breath.
(Illegal Award 908, Monster Freak!?)
"Stop giving Liger-chan any instructions and let her wild instincts take over."
"?"
"Meanwhile, we need to gather their attention as best we can to distance them from the more populated areas!! Got that!?"
Lu Niang Lan did not have time to explain everything to Aika *who could not see this*.
She was only focused on the line of fire.

While drawing this opponent’s attention along a line that did not place the white cat or the children in danger, the modified China dress beauty and the white liger took evasive action at the exact same instant. A moment later, a beam of light burned up into Toy Dream 35’s sky, destroying an entire bridge on its way.

Part 5

“Oh, ohh?”
Meinokawa Aoi stopped curiously poking at the contents of a small bait box to make an odd noise.
Something quite large had fallen into the water very nearby.
The cruiser rocked below her. Not even an experienced and battle-hardened(?) granny like her could do anything about this. She did not even have time to find something to grab onto. The silver-haired bikini girl fell to the deck, supported herself on all fours, and then realized something: what had happened to the bait box? Her question was soon answered by the box flipping upside-down and dumping its squirming contents right on her head.
They were not quite earthworms.
The ragworm and eunicid festival had begun.
“Gyaaaahhh!!!???”
The nearby seagulls fled from her scream.
The aquatic wrigglers were far more horrifying than their terrestrial brethren. A sticky feeling crawled all over her body. Aoi initially tried to get them off of her like she was brushing dust off of her clothes, but that was not enough and she felt the stickiness reaching her chest and hips. She concluded that the frilly extra cloth around her chest was getting in the way. She could never be sure if there was anywhere left for them to hide, so she resorted to scorched-earth tactics. Even though she was outside, she reached for the bow on her back, stuck her thumb below the elastic on the side of her hip, and gave a pleasant tug like she was pulling the pin from two grenades. With the rustling of cloth, she exposed every last centimeter of her body like it was a form of carpet bombing.
An odd light shined down on her.
“A-ahhh. Such freedom! I have never felt more liberated!!”
But this was no time to tremble in liberated ecstasy while bathing in the piercing sunshine below the blue August sky. Chunks of reinforced concrete larger than the cruiser were still falling from overhead and, even if she had gotten all of those creepy-crawlies off of her body, they were still all over the deck. Simply put, she was afraid of stepping on them with her bare feet. She felt a crawling sensation on her feet, so that childish granny abandoned her responsibility to clean up and fled into the cabin.
“Wahhhh, boy!! I can’t face them on my own!! Can you check to see if any of the bait got in my hair!?”

Had she not learned her lesson last time?
Kyousuke was still out of it, so when he saw Aoi in the nude, he silently picked her up, carried her to the bath, washed her silver hair, and then dove right back into the double bed. He was not even conscious of what he was doing. It was the same as a worried housewife cooking a fried egg without realizing it. It had nothing to do with what he wanted or did not want to do. He was running on autopilot.
It was an extreme case of summer heat fatigue.
“But this is fine. I only wanted to make sure none of the ragworms or eunicids got in my hair, so that worked perfectly. (mutter, mutter).
As a granny, she may not have known how to respond when someone treated her like a little girl. No, Kyousuke may have been treating her more like a large dog.
Another dull splash sounded outside.
A piece of rubble must have fallen nearby.
“Hey, boy. It sounds like there’s trouble afoot.”
“…”
“Soooomeoooone needs help!”
She shouted that in his ear while reaching behind her back to retie the black bikini top to regain her safety(?), but he remained face down in the bed.
After all, what was he supposed to do?
He had supposedly killed the White Queen at Houbi Village, but the Colorless Little Girl had been damaged, creating a new threat and increasing the world’s chaos by making the world’s people seek their own ruin.
Even Shigara Masami at Freedom Award 3000 had been taken in by the White Queen’s influence. She had *gone along with* the idea that a happy ending was good enough. She had succumbed to that beauty, sealed away the truth, and fled to the illusion of happiness without actually solving the fundamental problem. So what hope did anyone else have? Was this the end for the human race? Would they not even fight or risk their lives? Would they be left smiling as long as the White Queen stamped them with a label saying “you are happy”?
His eyes lazily turned toward his phone.
No missed calls.
When a summoner or vessel reached a certain number of Awards, they were erased from the memories and awareness of normal people. It was a simple rule. But could people’s hearts and the bonds that tied them together really be influenced so easily by those rules? By the Blood-Sign rules where the White Queen reigned supreme?
What did “help me” matter?
What did “Alice (with) Rabbit” matter?
No matter how much he hunkered down to desperately endure it all while waiting for an opening in the shrapnel-filled gale, the people around him

would quickly crumble and what little he had saved up would vanish. All his efforts would go to waste. So wouldn't it be easier to give up? Wasn't it silly to keep fighting? He looked like an idiot continuing to struggle all on his own. White could be turned to black and vice-versa. What the hell was that? How was he supposed to protect the righteousness of a world with no core of truth!?
He heard a nasal snort.
Black bikini Meinokawa Aoi put her hands on her hips, tugged on the side strap of her bikini bottom to produce a nice snapping sound, and looked down at him.
"Human, people need to take breaks from time to time. You might look like you are simply rotting away, but if you find it meaningful, then do as you wish."
"…"
"But do not forget: No summoner fights alone. Whether they are the strongest or the weakest, a summoner must rely on others. Even the Materials cover each other's weaknesses with the power of numbers. The only one who can truly wield their power as an individual is the White Queen you so detest. If you reject all others and assume you alone are special, that is when you will lose everything."
She did not seem interested in spending too much time on this. With a swish of her long silver hair, Meinokawa Aoi left the cabin.
Kyousuke still did not move.
So any change had to come from outside.
A quiet buzzing came from the bedside table. When he realized it was his phone vibrating, Kyousuke reached out his hand while still lying face down. He caught the mobile device when its own vibration caused it to slide off the table. Just like when he had washed Aoi's hair, his hand was moving automatically based on his memories.
Opening the screen revealed it was a group message on social media.
The commotion was coming from directly above, so probably near his school. This was only an automated message warning all of the students to stay indoors. They had no idea who was where during summer break, so they had simply sent it to everyone.
(Is that all?)
That did not mean there was anything left for him in that school life. Summoners with a certain number of Awards vanished from normal people's awareness. Even the classmates he greeted on a daily basis and studied with in the classroom would forget all about him once he left their line of sight. Online relationships were entirely out of the question. This message had only reached him because it was mechanically sent to everyone at the school, but he could never receive individual one-on-one messages. They would never think of sending him a message and, even if he sent them one, they would only tilt their head at it. From their point of view, *some unknown person* was contacting them like they were friends.

It all came down to the rules.
The rules of the Blood-Sign System that lifted up and glorified the White Queen.
That was just how it worked.
People's minds could be easily swayed and there was nothing anyone could do about it.
Yes.
So it should have been.
"Ren-Bow// Hey, have you still not finished the roll call? I kinda want to get out of here!!"
He was simply registered as a part of the group and no one from the class community would respond if he posted. But then something odd happened.
"Don't Call Me Librarian// Wait. Just once more."
"Ren-Bow// How many times have you done it now!?"
"Don't Call Me Librarian// How do I put this? Don't you feel like we're forgetting someone?"
"Don't Call Me Librarian// Like the count is coming up short…"
(What?)
Kyousuke frowned.
Instead of simply having his body respond to the outside world on autopilot, his mind actually started moving. The gears resumed turning. He consciously sat up in bed. Meanwhile, more speech bubble messages scrolled across the screen.
"I'm the Center// That's definitely a worrying thought."
"Himiko// Yes, it would be bad if anyone was trapped in the middle of this."
"Future Guitarist// I'll try contacting whoever it is using a different tool. Sorry if anyone gets duplicate messages."
He assumed they were talking about some easily-forgettable classmate other than him, but that was not the case. Their roll call found a single member of the class missing. That meant everyone except Kyousuke was accounted for. But it would end there. They would not find this strange. Once he was outside their line of sight, they would forget all about him, so they would be satisfied with this and move on.
And yet.
And yet.
"Don't Call Me Librarian// Once more! Just once more!!"
"Ren-Bow// Okay, fine! We'll stick with it until everyone's accounted for!!"
"……
……What is this?"
It might seem like a tiny thing at first glance.
But it was not.
Librarian-chan, Rendou Akiya, and the rest of the classmates were fighting the absolute rule stating that summoners and vessels could not be perceived when outside their line of sight. Of course, there was no way they could do it. The rules were rules and they would be meaningless if they

could be broken. But those students refused to give up on their hopeless task. They were continuing their efforts which would never be rewarded. Their lives were at risk.
It was all over if they failed to escape in time.
But they were restraining their pounding hearts and staying put based on no more than a vague sense that “something isn’t right”. They were fighting the Blood-Sign System rules that lionized the White Queen. As if to protest the idea that nothing could be done about it.
Why?
The answer was obvious.
They were worried for the unknown person they were not sure was safe.
They were worried for *him*.
“…”
A deafening alarm blared inside of Shiroyama Kyousuke.
Could he abandon this?
Could he declare this worthless?
Could he give up on people’s hearts and the bonds that tied them together?
Could he deny that strength?
Shigara Masami had been moved to emotion…no, had been tricked into thinking she had and the White Queen’s influence had reached her. She had given up on fighting to the bitter rend and she was trying to compromise with a half-assed happy ending. *So what?* Was that any reason to give up on the other 7 billion people out there? Was that worth criticizing Librarian-chan or Rendou Akiya over? Not a chance. What did Shigara Masami’s failure have to do with anyone else? To judge each and every one of them, he had to look to each and every one of them. Why had it taken him so long to realize something so obvious!?
The most important things were not necessarily found in an elite few.
In fact, viewing Shigara Masami as some special genius because she was Freedom Award 3000 was disturbingly similar to the thought process that led people to worship the White Queen as some twisted ruler. Right? Wasn’t that true? Hadn’t Shiroyama Kyousuke loathed the free pass people gave her violence because she was a special being and the way people viewed eccentrics as geniuses as long as they produced results?
Everyone had something.
Everyone had something they wanted to protect even if it meant bending the rules of the world.
And.
His entirely ordinary classmates had proven it. Their attempts were doomed to fail, but they did not want to evacuate without Shiroyama Kyousuke who had shared a classroom with them.
They did not want to forget him.
They did not want to leave him behind.
What did being the strongest matter?
What good was logic?

How could he write off their actions as wasted effort!!!???
“I was wrong.”
Alice (with) Rabbit had stayed 5 or 10 steps ahead of the average person and defeated all sorts of fierce warriors with his absurd combat ability. But it was that very cleverness that kept him from avoiding this decision.
No one had a monopoly on human strength.
Everyone had it equally.
“I was dead wrong.”

●●●●○ SoftPunk 4G
図書委員って呼ぶな
もう一回、あと一回だけ！！
連弩
うるせえな分かったよ！
全員揃うまで付き合うよ！！
ウサギ
もう大丈夫、
僕の事なら心配いらないよ

His index finger moved across the 5-inch screen. He had learned here that there was work that required a strength very different from the deadly Summoning Ceremony battles. No one would be able to recognize it. They would mistake any message for something from a stranger who had somehow made it into the system. He knew that. He really did. But his response was as follows: so what?
Now was not the time to be rotting away in his own little world.
The boy gathered his resolve and tapped his finger on the screen.
He sent out his powerful words.
“Rabbit// I’m fine now, so don’t worry about me.”
And.
While crouched down on the cruiser’s deck, cautiously picking up a ragworm, and returning it to the bait box, black bikini Meinokawa Aoi looked back. The vessel was trying to overcome her fear and solve the problem she had caused, but she grinned as soon as she saw his face.
“Stand up,” he said.
“You need to symbolize your return, do you? Fine, I will help.”
A dull sound of impact followed.
Shiroyama Kyousuke had punched his own cheek with a tightly clenched fist.
“Are you a masochist?” asked Aoi in amusement. “But I like it. You finally look like a man, boy.”
Swimsuit time was over for Aoi. It was now time to support him as a vessel.
With the sound of cloth flapping in the air, the frilly black bikini girl grabbed a shrine maiden outfit and a white sarashi.
“Are you ready now?”
“Yes.”
He wiped off his split lip and held the finger out toward Aoi. Needless to say, this was the ceremony a summoner and vessel used to form a contract.
He would not make this mistake again.
And he would challenge that white disaster as many times as it took.
“Sorry it took me so long. Let’s settle this immediately!!”

Part 6

She did not summon a legendary dragon or spread her arms to fly around all on her own.
The White Queen sat on a bench in an international airport lobby just like anyone else. She was in the business class priority boarding zone, but it was summer break. The place was packed. A young brother and sister were loudly fighting over a robot toy right next to her on one of the many long benches.
She was not wearing her usual battle costume that looked like a wedding dress cut down to size with silver armor covering the important parts.
She only wore a casual summer dress with thin fabric. It was like she had had been forced to find a change of clothes after having water dumped over her head. Her chest, armpits, and bright thighs were all too risqué. The borrowed clothing was simply too short in a number of places. She wore narrow walking sandals on her feet. It was all white, so the selection may have been made with her tastes in mind.
She wore hair ties in her hair.
Those twintails were the one remnant of her former look.
She was lazily waiting her turn to board the business class of Flight NAL901. At first glance, it may have looked like the silver twintail girl had regained her common sense. At least compared to traveling by breaking through the stratosphere with no outside assistance or directly slicing through the dimension.
But something was fundamentally wrong here.
“Hi, hi, hiii!”
A waitress demon with long pink hair and a cow horn headdress called out to her. It was Biondetta. She boldly showed off a couple of passports in the middle of the public international airport lobby.
It was likely only meant to draw the eyes of the White Queen and Shigara Masami, but she bent over and accentuated her large breasts in a needlessly provocative way.
“This one’s yours, Shigara Masami. And this one’s yours, White Queen. These are pretty important in human society, so don’t lose them, okay?”
<Yes, they’re instant insurance for travelers.>
“Be careful. These can gather a lot of unwanted attention if they get out.”
That was why Biondetta had been holding on to them to handle the processing, but that was not what mattered here.

Biondetta Shiroyama had just handed them brand-new passports. And they were made with printing techniques *possibly even more precise than the real ones*.
They were not using the Blood-Sign System, so they could have their photos taken as long as they were not in an Artificial Sacred Ground. The White Queen found it odd to see a photo of herself.
But that was not the crux of the issue.
“Shigara Masami.”
<What is it, Queen?>
“Um, isn’t this against the rules???”
<But we can’t reach Japan without a passport.>
That woman toying with the whistle around her neck provided the illusion of being a capable adult, but she was actually very devil-may-care. It pained the White Queen to remember that someone like that had managed to break her with a lecture. Think of it like being scolded for holding your chopsticks wrong by a drunk with a horse-racing newspaper in hand who was drinking beer at a restaurant in the middle of the day.
<Well, that sure took a while, didn’t it? I wanted to complete the digital investigation first so the trip wouldn’t be a waste of time, but I didn’t expect that to take more than two weeks.>
“Um, Queen? Why does Shigara Masami look so happy talking about all the tedious work she did?”
“Remember the bottles of Sbirnoff, Absolium, and vodka she was waving around earlier? They only allow small containers of liquid on the flight, so she started drinking it all to sulk. And now I believe it is catching up with her.”
As the resident of another world, the White Queen had no personal information to include on the passport. Everything from her nationality to her age was made up. The name appeared to be a simple anagram of iu – nu – fb – a – wuh – ei –kx – eu – pl – vjz. Perhaps out of respect for the Blood-Sign System which placed such importance on the meaning found in letters and names.
Biondetta also waved around her own passport.
“Anyway, it is a very moving experience to meet with you again.”
“You don’t hold a grudge?”
That question sounded simple, but it carried deep meaning.
The White Queen was the one who had torn apart Kyousuke and Biondetta as children. But what about Shigara Masami? No matter what she had thought deep, deep down, she had contacted those children while hiding her true identity and she had run the entire Miniature Garden as Freedom Award 3000.
Complex emotions surrounded the White Queen and Shigara Masami.
But even though Biondetta may have been justified in criticizing the two of them…

“Not really, no.” She placed a finger on her slender chin like a child who had forgotten what fear was. “Do I hate the White Queen? Yes, because I have the Queen’s hatred. But during the final stage of the Secret War, I was mostly just trying to escape and I never directly fought you. The person I had to fight in the very end was Alberto the Hatter. So I do have to wonder whether or not the image of the White Queen *that it’s said* I saw was really the whole picture.”
She made this point very clear.
“And you did not kill my little brother, Kyousuke-chan. Even though he must have directly confronted you, unlike me.”
“…”
“That is not some vague image; it is an undeniable result. So I will focus on that result. You may be twisted, foolish, awkward, and inept, but I know you will always do what Kyousuke-chan needs you to do. No matter how much you must suppress yourself or dirty your hands. Praying to you is silly and expecting anything in return is the height of folly, but when it comes to him, you will act without needing to hear anyone’s prayers or asking anything of anyone else. That is the one thing I can trust about you.”
The White Queen could not decide whether or not she could rely on this.
She rubbed together the thighs visible below her thin casual dress.
Biondetta was just as unreliable as Kyousuke.
“And I also want to see what lies at Kyousuke-chan’s foundation,” added the waitress demon while scratching her cheek. “I signed a contract with him and fought alongside him, so I believe I’ve seen his enmity for you more than most. There’s something odd about that hostility. It feels so different from the thought processes that make him reach out a hand whenever he hears the words ‘help me’. …And wouldn’t it be sad if it turned out that had been implanted inside him by someone else?”
Doctor S.
A precision-guided missile.
“I think this needs to be settled one way or another.” Biondetta sounded like she was spitting the words at someone not present. “But that needs to be done between you and him with no one else intervening. I don’t care what lofty ideals or grand plans are involved.”
If the ever-expanding cocoon and the power-gathering Colorless Little Girl were not stopped, the human race had no future.
And the only way to stop them was for the White Queen herself to change.
She had to use her *journey to understand what it means to be human* to understand Shiroyama Kyousuke and overcome her issues with Shigara Masami.
The White Queen glanced out the window covering the entire wall, but she viewed something only she could see.
“The cocoon should reach 6km before long.”
A soft tone sounded.

Next, a gentle female announcer spoke, although it was hard to tell if it was live or a recording.
“Flight NAL901 will take off on schedule. Boarding will begin in less than an hour. Please do not forget any of your luggage as you board. First class and business class passengers should gather in the priority boarding zone and economy class passengers should gather in the general boarding zone B.”
That acted as a quiet starting pistol.
The White Queen slowly stood from the bench with her short casual dress fluttering dangerously at her thighs. Shigara Masami stood to her right and Biondetta to her left. Flanked by veterans of the Secret War, the silver-haired girl silently faced forward.
Some of the world’s data had been erased by some past action.
This was a journey to learn what it meant to be human.
This path would take her to Shiroyama Kyousuke’s mother and *little sister*.
“Let us see where it all began.”

Sinceria Report 02

Q. What do you think about Shiroyama Kyousuke?

“Hm? That’s a really broad question and I’m not sure what you’re getting at, but I’m gonna marry him.”
“As you can see, he must be swiftly cut down as the vile criminal who drove the princess to madness.”
This discussion was held on Kingdom F’s royal plane.
Olivia Highland had her blonde hair in double braids, wore a school swimsuit with a decorative collar and pareo, and was 100% serious when she said she would marry “Onii-chan” when she grew up. Rachel Wormwood was a knight in glasses who looked ready to kill someone right here and now. Olivia should have returned to being a normal person after ending her contract with Kyousuke, but here she was speaking normally with a summoner like Rachel and a vessel like Sinceria. Her memories and awareness returned when they were in her line of sight, so conversations like this could continue just fine.
Since it was their royal plane, they could bring anything aboard without going through strict anti-terrorism checks. And unlike your average charter flight, this plane was large enough to hold more than 3000 passengers, but it had been redesigned for no more than 10. In her blue dress, Sinceria sat on a sofa much more spacious than any first class seat and rolled around a tall glass of Château de Corail 1999 (mo) – it sounded fancy, but it was just sparkling wine easily bought from French online stores – that a maid had poured for her.
Sinceria knew when to show restraint. A lot of money had to be poured into the royal plane for safety reasons, but the drink was only a personal luxury. And she did not even have the excuse of serving it to a foreign diplomat in this case. So as long as it came from a vineyard with no risk of a poison being mixed in, it could come from anywhere.
And high prices at auction were not what gave a wine its flavor.
The true connoisseurs knew where to find treasures hidden quite close by. And they were not foolish enough to spread the word about their personal treasure. They did not want it to become a target of speculation or reselling, did they?

“No, not that. I am talking about the secret to Kyousuke’s strength. Or the source of his obsession if you would prefer.”
Sinceria would not make a fool of herself in front of her daughter just because she was a little buzzed. She only sipped at the faintly golden liquid as a way of loosening her tongue.

When Olivia begged for some wine too, their skilled maids poured her a nonalcoholic sparkling wine made at the exact same vineyard. It was really just a carbonated grape juice made by simply removing the skins, but the school swimsuit braid girl did not notice because the bottle and label looked so fancy.
“Onii-chan is my hero! He saves anyone who asks for help!!”
“He deserves countless deaths for going over the knights’ heads and stealing the princess’s heart, but…hmph. I do sense an insane sort of strength in his abnormal policy. But our kingdom and the world cannot run on feelings alone (mutter mutter) and he could always ask for some help (mutter mutter).”
“Rachel, are you after Onii-chan too? Should I see you as a rival???”
Sinceria smiled at Olivia who tried to act like an adult by grabbing an olive from the large plate of finger foods and tossing it into her mouth.
“Well, he did secretly save her life at least three times during the war. Via, had you heard this story? When she had collapsed from an arrow to the thigh, Kyousuke sucked out the poison and then princess-carried her to safety. He gave her the old kiss-kiss-hug☆”
Despite the critical shout of “My Queen!!”, Sinceria childishly stuck out her tongue with her milky skin and long ears somewhat flushed. She loved the ability to blame the alcohol for anything she said. And it felt right to go with a childish sparkling wine over a red or a white.
She munched on a kiddy cracker smeared with cream cheese and raisins while listening to her summoner speak.
“Anyway, Shiroyama Kyousuke never did like talking about his past. He likes looking after others and part of that makes him something of an explainer. He has no issue with holding conversations and he will dig right in to the private lives of his vessel. It isn’t that he does not like talking about himself, but he always changes the subject and redirects things back toward you when his past comes up.”
“Really, Rachel? Onii-chan didn’t hide anything from me. Like he told me he really loves cereal.”
“That was him changing the subject from-…ahem, ignore that, princess. Please do not glare at me like that. My heart cannot take it.”
Sinceria thought for a while as she spun her tall glass and made air bubbles dance through the liquid. When she opened her mouth, she was speaking more to her own reflection in the glass than anyone else there.
“Does Kyousuke have trouble facing his own past?”
“?”
(If so, what part of his past are we talking about?)
This fit with Azalea Magentarain’s theory that the key to it all could be found at Shiroyama Kyousuke’s roots. So was that the right place to investigate? The beautiful ruler of Kingdom F fell deeper into thought while Olivia and Rachel gave her curious looks.

The cocoon continued to grow and it was applying pressure to Kingdom F's border. If the Colorless Little Girl was amassing power in response, the entire world was in danger. They could not afford to wait. They needed to solve the mystery of Shiroyama Kyousuke even if it was only to predict the White Queen's actions.
Then the other two started whispering to each other.
"(S-surely I don't have to add mother to my list of rivals, right? I don't want to do that. There's no way I can beat those boobs! And no matter who wins, the royal family is going to be super awkward. Will we have a closed-room suspense theatre in an Eastern European castle!?)"
"(Do not even suggest such a thing, princess! What a horrific thought!! If that insane cereal rabbit ever wears the crown of Kingdom F, I will stage a coup to overthrow him!!)"
"(Oh, so the criminal could be from outside the family? It couldn't be sillier, but it isn't very exciting if we don't discuss every possibility. Although if you see it that way, won't you end up doing that when I marry Onii-chan? Wow, Rachel, you're going to have a rough life. When's the movie coming out?)"
"(Gh, the queen and princess have both gone mad!! Does Kingdom F have no hope of a healthy future!?)"

Facts

- Aika is a shut-in and generally does not leave her apartment, but she can have the white liger move about on her own. Just like Lu Niang Lan, the liger is very useful until a Material has been summoned.
- The chaos spreading across the world has created some rogue elements among the summoners and vessels of the three major powers. With cries of “down with the Queen”, they are apparently searching for the Queen in order to kill her. But it is unknown whether they could actually do this if they did find her.
- Normal people like the Librarian and Rendou Akiya cannot remember Shiroyama Kyousuke when he is not in their field of vision. But that does not meant their efforts should be ignored.
- Shigara Masami and the White Queen have chosen to work with Biondetta to help them interact with and blend into human society. Biondetta seems to be using this journey to learn what it means to be human in order to root for her little brother and the White Queen’s love
- Shiroyama Kyousuke made a contract with Meinokawa Aoi.
- Stay strong and do not let the White Queen influence you. No one is interested in a love comedy.

Stage 02: Stand Back Up and Return to the Starting Point

“Actually, what did you climb up this high to see?”
“I was watching my knight in shining armor fight against the world’s tragedies☆”
(Stage 02 Open 08/21 12:00)
Stand Back Up and Return to the Starting Point

Part 1

It did not matter if it was ugly.
He had never wanted to be the strongest who could cleverly do anything and everything.
A dull sound rang out.
It came from one of the large bridges in Toy Dream 35's R Block where so many schools were located.
This was an unbelievable choice according to the standard theory of the Summoning Ceremony. The rogue Illegal summoner known as Monster Freak had already reached the Divine-class. He had summoned an evil Norse dragon that's name began with "n" and that had a Sound Range of low and a Cost of 8. Challenging that while starting with a Cost 1 Regulation-class was utter suicide.
And yet.
And yet.
"Wha-?"
Shiroyama Kyousuke did not respond to the confused man who wore a black jacket made from the leather of various animals: cow, snake, crocodile, etc. The man must have sacrificed his own allies to reach a Material with such a high Cost. The 3D Artificial Sacred Ground had already been set up, but once you used up your initial 3 White Thorns, it was possible to join in.
Kyousuke did not hesitate.
With his Repliglass Blood-Sign resting on his shoulder and his vessel by his side, he stepped right into that field ruled by a Divine-class.
The definite killer intent seemed to muffle the loud cicada cries.
Monster Freak forced himself to yell at the boy while holding a Blood-Sign carved from banned ivory and decorated with tortoiseshell.
"What, you wanna end up a smear on the pavement!?"
"Can it, *rookie*."
The 10 seconds bought by that unnecessary exchange of words was more than enough.
Kyousuke gained a single new White Thorn.
The tip of his Blood-Sign struck the glowing white ball of the White Thorn and it contacted one of the glowing red Petals floating in the air. They bounced around and several different Petals dropped into the Spots opened directly in space.

It likely functioned as a psychological restraint, but the silver-haired shrine maiden reached below her shrine maiden outfit and tightened the pure white sarashi around her chest. She raised her voice as she transformed into the colorful slime of the Original Series.
“Hah hah hah!! I’ll show you what the world’s oldest Joruri Method can do!!”
Of course, Monster Freak had no reason to wait.
The black jacket man snapped his fingers and the large dragon took a step forward. That was enough to apply pressure to the entire space enclosed by the Artificial Sacred Ground. After all, there was a considerable difference between a Regulation-class and a Divine-class. A single scratch from a claw would mean instant death.
Or so Monster Freak assumed.
A metallic sound came from Shiroyama Kyousuke’s feet. *But why was there another metallic sound when the Incense Grenade had already been thrown?* The black jacket man was briefly confused, but then he caught on.
“Watch out, Sumomo!! Is he trying to rattle us!?”
Then something happened.
There was a bursting sound, but no flash of light or explosive blast. It really was no more than an Incense Grenade. It was an entirely meaningless action since the Summoning Ceremony had already begun.
However.
It did do something. It did release something into the air.
How would you react to a normally unthinkable situation in the middle of a battle?
Shiroyama Kyousuke had stepped in front of his Material to use his protective circle as a shield for the Cost 1 Material.
And no matter what the vessel at the core thought, the summoned Divine-class *was afraid of this unthinkable situation*.
It may have been a lot like a shogi or chess AI hanging up when it failed to react properly to a movement no human would ever make.
Monster Freak’s dragon roared.
That was meant to threaten what it feared.
Even though Kyousuke had only summoned the weakest of the weakest, a Cost 1 Regulation-class of the Original Series.
With the exception of rare cases like Sinceria or Olivia, a vessel did not have full control over the Material. They could only guide that mass of fighting instincts toward the target like they were moving a struggling cursor.
What would happen if the dragon itself succumbed to an irregular state of fear?
There was no way of calming it down.
“Tch!! Sumomo, regain control of Nidhoggr!!”
“Too late.”
Two icy words cut in.
It felt like a joke.

Kyousuke had already secured several Petals, so his Material had cast off the title of the weakest.
It was now a collection of red laser beams bouncing around like they were in a room of mirrors.
“You might have had a chance if you had immediately summoned a different Divine-class to reset things.”
But the man had been afraid to let go of the overwhelming power that Divine-class provided.
The confusion had bought Kyousuke 30 seconds.
That was all it took for him to catch up and grow into a legitimate threat.
It was too late by the time the black jacket man actually started thinking.
It was a giant serpent with 8 heads.
Divine-class. Sound Range: Middle. Cost: 14. An ancient Japanese dragon that contained a divine sword and that’s name started with a “y”.
The Sound Range and Cost were superior.
“Oh.”
There was nothing he could do.
Monster Freak tried to raise his ivory and tortoiseshell Blood-Sign once more, but…
“Owaaa

By jumping down and placing his feet on that new bridge, the Artificial Sacred Ground moved to contain these veteran fighters. It was one-against-three and Kyousuke had only just demonstrated that a Divine-class was not an absolute advantage.
But it did not matter.
No matter what, that boy would do whatever it took to ensure nothing happened to the classmates who had struggled to remember him.
This was not a temporary home.
It was a line he had to defend with his life.
With the Repliglass Blood-Sign resting on his shoulder, he beckoned to the enemy with the fingers of his other hand.
“I’ll take you all on at once. If your skill lives up to your nicknames, then bring it on.”
It might as well have been an explosion.
Those three rogue summoners had been crushed by the White Queen and Colorless Little Girl’s pressure and they all took action in different ways.
But the phrase they introduced to the fray was identical.
“Down with the Queen!!”
“Posers.”
But he easily swept them aside.
“That’s my job.”

Part 2

“Wahyah!”
A short distance away, the cartoonish Aika-chan doll made a weird noise from the white liger’s back.
The modified China dress beauty next to it gave an exasperated comment.
“I thought your cameras couldn’t show you what’s happening in the Artificial Sacred Ground.”
“I can’t see it, but my Onii-chan sense is tingling.” Aika sounded like she was dreaming. “I can tell he’s back.”
“That he is.”
This was no surprise.
When that boy was carrying some kind of weight, he possessed an indomitable strength.
The enemy ranged from the high 800s to the low 900s and he was taking on three of them at once. Kyousuke never assumed his position or his Divine-class Material gave him an unbeatable advantage. At times he destroyed the ground below his feet to get a fresh start and sometimes he used his own protective circle as a shield while he continually beat down the rogue summoners.
The summoners on the receiving end of that beating were supposed to be Illegal’s secret fighters. This was a serious loss for the modified China dress beauty, but Lu Niang Lan was actually smiling a little.
How could she say it?
That boy had always kept his distance from his surroundings out of fear of the White Queen and of losing the things he cared for, but now he was baring his teeth and going on the attack. He had finally accepted the city he lived in was worth protecting like this. And now that he was fighting so fiercely, how could she tell him to stop?
“Welcome back, Kyousuke-chan.”
But then the white liger spun around to face the other way.
This time it was not a summoner or vessel. It was Repliglass soldiers with white armor enveloping them. That cutting-edge equipment was not common in underground Illegal, but the number of soldiers continued to grow: 20, 30, 40, and even more.
The obvious conclusion was…
“Government too?” asked Lu Niang Lan.
“So it seems,” replied Aika.

The chaos was worldwide, so there would be plenty of rogue fighters to go around.
The White Queen and the Colorless Little Girl.
Their conflict had created a formless madness like the world was ending tomorrow and it spread that frenzy as if by a mysterious signal. Individual morals were easily swept aside and they would spread destruction like it was the latest fad.
In this world, everyone went mad and rushed to destroy.
But Lu Niang Lan and the white liger did not stop fighting.
Down with the Queen?
Why should they care about that? The only thing on their minds was the world they wanted to protect.

Part 3

And, in what may have been a response to what had happened, a voice spoke in one of the two worlds.
<Nii-sama.>

Part 4

The last one, Illegal Award 910, Sinful Monk, collapsed to the ground with a thud.
“There, that should do it.”
“Indeed.”
Aoi lazily responded after returning to being a silver-haired shrine maiden. She held up a slender hand to protect her eyes as she looked up into the sunny blue sky that echoed with cicada cries.
“Whew, you really start sweating as soon as you turn back to normal. And I think I tightened my sarashi too much. Ugh, too much pressure on my chest.”
“Hm? Come to think of it, why a sarashi???”
“It is my restraint as a vessel. Plus I’m not an exhibitionist, so I’m not going to walk around in public with my boobs jiggling everywhere. Even an old lady worries about those things, you know?”
Releasing Aoi from her Material form was not a problem. There was no point in continuing the Chain because the ground was littered with defeated enemies. No one was left to fight them, so Kyousuke looked around while Aoi worked at loosening her white sarashi.
“Yahoo. Got things settled there?”
“Lu-san.”
“I’m here too.”
Lu Niang Lan and Aika must have fought off the ordinary firepower while Kyousuke and Aoi were battling the summoners. It was hard to say which was the harder job when a gun was more than enough of a threat to someone without a protective circle. Shiroyama Kyousuke never forgot that even when wielding his special power.
“Um, why is that white cat rubbing up against the white liger? And it seems to be offering her a captured cicada.”
“Oh, the cute little thing is going with a gift strategy?” said Aika. “That is the liger’s new follower. I believe we are witnessing the birth of a true harem.”
“?”
They had settled the Club Resistance problem.
The high school was unscathed.
But the fundamental global chaos remained. The White Queen and Colorless Little Girl’s conflict created massive pressure. Anyone could succumb to

that pressure at any time and run amok while shouting “down with the Queen”. There was no division between expert and amateur here.
It had been an outside enemy this time, but what if it was Librarian-chan, Rendou Akiya, or one of the other students next time?
“I need to do something about this,” said Shiroyama Kyousuke.
This was a turning point for the world and it was obvious who he would support when the options were the White Queen and the Colorless Little Girl.
“I will thoroughly crush the White Queen and fully shift the world onto the other set of rails. I will update the entire world from the Third to the Fourth. And I will keep it there. I can’t let her keep getting away with this. It doesn’t really matter whether or not she’s doing it consciously. I will stop that cocoon and stop the Colorless Little Girl’s rampage linked to it. That is my top priority and I will attempt everything necessary to pull it off.”
“I will help. But.”
Aoi breathed an exasperated sigh while Lu Niang Lan and the white liger focused on her. She must have successfully loosened the sarashi a little.
“To be honest, I am not quite sure whether you are acting rationally or are on a rampage of your own. It’s too much to watch, so I think the medicine you need now is to take a look at that school.”
Shiroyama Kyousuke narrowed his eyes a little.
But he did not look back. He replied with his Blood-Sign on his shoulder and his back to that gentle light.
“Not yet.”
“Why not?”
“If I relax here, something will threaten to crush me. Even kindness can be toxic. I can’t afford to collapse yet.”
“You really are a fighter to the core, aren’t you? Okay, fine!! I will see this through to the end, so I hope you are ready. I will not let you screw this up after coming so far!!”
Then the cartoonish doll on the white liger’s back spoke up.
“But what exactly will you do now?”
“Chasing after the White Queen seems like the only option for now.”
“Chase after her?” Lu Niang Lan frowned. “But how? You don’t know where she is.”
Kyousuke sighed before answering.
“I just have to ask myself where she would be. That’s how the Queen and I were made.”

Part 5

Below the midsummer sun and cumulonimbus clouds was a cylindrical water tank on a school roof.
A normally obedient and unobtrusive girl sat on the very top of it.
“Hm, hm, hmm, hm, hmm☆”
Her name was Umie Shouko.
If history had been just a little different, she would have been the star of a ghost story known as the Rainy Girl, but she had instead grown into a short but feminine high school girl.
“Heyyyy, Onee-chaaaan!”
“?”
While wearing her school swimsuit, she looked down at the voice from below and saw a hand reaching nervously up from the rusty ladder. It was a girl with glasses and a braid. That very librarian-esque girl was Umie Shouko’s younger sister.
But this was summer break and that sister was apparently cutting loose somewhat, just like Shouko was by climbing up onto the water tank (in her swimsuit).
“Oh? Ryouko-chan, were you walking around school dressed like that? Your swimsuit is still wet, so you must have dripped water everywhere. Let’s hope people don’t start spreading rumors of a Wet Girl or something.”
“There was some kind of trouble, so the event was canceled! So let’s get back home, Onee-chan. I’m the lifeguard, so I’ll get in trouble if I leave anyone behind.”
“Oh, that’s too bad. But I think things should be okay now.”
“Actually, what did you climb up this high to see? Aren’t those the bird watching club’s binoculars?”
“Hm, hm, hmm. This is what everyone really wanted to do.”
The older sister (who was shorter but with a sexier figure) hummed at the younger sister’s question.
“What’s that supposed to mean?”
“I was watching my knight in shining armor fight against the world’s tragedies☆”
“???”

Part 6

That night, the royal plane carrying Sinceria Highland arrived at the international airport in Toy Dream 35's A Block.
This was Shiroyama Kyousuke's home ground where he kept his cruiser, but she was not there to see him. She had apparently used a music app or online video to start learning this country's popular songs because she hummed one of the latest hits while performing some work.
"Hm, hm, hmm, hm, hmm☆"
"What are you doing, mom?"
Olivia sat next to her mother with her two blonde braids, school swimsuit, and decorative collar, but she did not actually sit on the woman's lap. That made Sinceria a little sad as a mother, but she held out the memo pad she had been writing on with a fountain pen.
"Tah dah! Your mother just listed up all of Kyousuke's past girls. These are all the vessels that bunny has saved☆"
"……
……"
"Our top priority is saving Kingdom F from the cocoon, so I do not care if this is unfair or underhanded. The quickest shortcut here would be to get Kyousuke on our side! So we will give him our full support. A skilled lawyer or trainer will learn what makes their client tick and provide them with the best possible advice when things are not going well. …Yes, I see your mouth turning into a small triangle out of jealousy, but you reign supreme on this list, Via."
"But why are you on a list of 'girls', mom?"
"Oh, come on. He saved me personally during that civil war as much as he saved you☆"
"Personally!? You mean you're saying this as a woman!?"
Her daughter tearfully shouted at her, but she ignored it.
This list might be necessary to discover Shiroyama Kyousuke's roots as a person. Even if he would dodge the questions or was unaware of it himself, the vessels who had accompanied him might be able to tell them more.
Fluffy blonde Sinceria was a skilled vessel herself.
Experience meant more than logic when speculating about things like this.
"But it seems most of the list is concentrated inside Japan."
"National boundaries are meaningless in the face of love!!"

“Yes, of course. We welcome him to marry into the royal family. Keh heh heh. And then your mother might just borrow him when she is bored.”
It was amusing how Rachel started freaking out over that, so Sinceria left it at that.
However. Since Kyousuke’s activities had mostly occurred in Japan, that meant the White Queen had also been witnessed there most frequently. There was likely some unique trait to that country. It was technologically advanced, its religious views were willing to absorb anything from other religions, and it was part of East Asia yet had a strong Western-style capitalist ideology thanks to America’s influence. And let us not forget about the presence of the Queen’s Miniature Garden.
And one other thing.
(This land has no connection to Nostradamus, but it experienced a major frenzy related to his prophecy in July of 1999.)
Just as Sinceria pondered that in her blue dress, the plane shook violently. That was not too unusual if they ran across some turbulence, but it was in the process of landing. Being tossed about this close to the runaway introduced a serious possibility of crashing and bursting into flames.
Rachel remained standing perfectly straight despite the shaking and she barked a question into the small radio in her ear.
“What happened!?”
“It appears to be a riot! Some rioters managed to break through airport security and have entered the runway!!”
That would be what they had been avoiding by leaving their scheduled path. But they had descended too far to rapidly ascend once more. Raising the nose might even scrape the tail against the ground. The giant tires just barely avoided the rioters as they forcibly landed off the straight line of the runway. A scream came from the control tower, they cut right past a fueling truck, and they grazed the nose of a passenger plane moving along a different runway, but they still had their momentum. Toy Dream 35 could almost be thought of as a midair city built on the many buildings rising from the ocean, so the international airport was built on the square of land supported by over 100 pillars and it did not have much room to spare. Overrunning the runways would send them tumbling right into the ocean. Just before that happened, they broke through several fairly useless safety nets and came to a stop right next to the edge of the square.
The pilot (who had fewer than 100 Awards) continued to explain.
“I must deeply apologize. If anything has happened to the royal family, I-…”
“Enough formalities. I will apologize to our queen as the commanding bodyguard. What is the situation?”
“According to our sensors, there is no risk of overheating or fires. But we are awfully close to the edge, so please use the rear exit when disembarking. The remains of the safety nets will make it difficult to call a stair truck right away. I recommend using the escape slide.”
“Oh, how fun. I have always wanted to do that at least once.”

“My queen.” The straitlaced glasses knight breathed an exasperated sigh. “If members of our honorable royal family must use emergency measures, whoever is in charge at the airport may feel the need to resign in disgrace. I apologize, but I do recommend you wait on the stair truck to help the airport officials save face.”
“Hmm. Our Kingdom F has vanished from official history, so I really doubt this will cause much in the way of criticism.” Long-eared Sinceria placed a finger on her slender chin. “And, Rachel, this may not be the time to worry about that. As the ruler of the knights, I command you to prepare for battle.”
“?”
“Those rioters seem to be making their way toward us. Looking out the window, it looks like 50 to 100 of them managed to get past airport security. But these are only ordinary people, so do not use the Summoning Ceremony. Stick to your battle hook.”
“If that is your command.”
She did not hesitate. In her silver armor and tight skirt, Rachel put on the face of a warrior. She snapped her fingers to gather the other bodyguards on the plane and then began discussing the actual formation to use.
“Let me be clear,” said Sinceria. “If we are to keep any of the airport workers from being fired, nothing can happen to me here. But if something happens to Via, I will lose control of myself *as a mother, as a woman, and as a queen.*”
“It does not matter where we are. We knights will not allow a scratch on any member of our noble royal family.”
“Well said, Rachel.”
The knights of Kingdom F did not sneak around in the shadows. Even as the rioters approached in their self-made frenzy, the knights threw open the plane’s door as if to greet them.
“Via, excuse me a moment.”
“Wahyah!”
Kingdom F’s royal family had arrived.
The height was equivalent to a 2 or 3 story building, so the makeshift slide was not necessary. Sinceria picked up her young daughter and set foot on the asphalt runway as light as a feather.
“Wow, summer here is so humid.”
“That’s why they have such an advanced swimsuit culture. I’m so jealous everyone here can go to the beach whenever they want.”
While surrounded by veteran knights and standing majestically on the runway, the ruler in a dress viewed something other than the rioters.
She gently sighed and kept the words in her heart.
(I’m surprised. I thought Toy Dream 35 was only Kyousuke’s temporary home, but his roots are located quite nearby.)
Shiroyama Kyousuke had revealed some bits and pieces of information during the war in Kingdom F.

He could not remember his mother or *little sister*.
The White Queen had apparently erased the data from the world, but that may have been better than if it had been intentionally concealed. This way, there were a few hints remaining.
The rioters were still a short distance away.
But a few of them were spinning something around over their head. They appeared to be towels or belts, but they were being used differently.
Someone who used Incense Grenades would have plenty of chances to see "things like that" and Sinceria had experienced that cruel civil war. Did those makeshift slings contain bricks or Molotov cocktails? She did not know what would be thrown with the centrifugal force, but their hostility was clear.
Sinceria shut her eyes and gave an order to protect her daughter more than herself.
"Begin suppression."
It only took an instant.
Her silver-armored hounds were released like a blowing gale.

Part 7

Also in Toy Dream 35's international airport, something was happening inside the ordinary passenger plane the Kingdom F royal plane had just barely grazed.
<Oh, wow. I didn't expect to run into someone here of all places.>
The ponytailed researcher named Shigara Masami sank down extra far in her business class seat so there was no chance of seeing her through the window. If she was here, then two other VIPs had to be here as well.
"Urp. Why does Shigara reek of alcohol?"
"You can blame that on the in-flight all-you-can-drink service. But why do they have these lost Japanese whiskies like a Hamazaki 12 year and a Hakuzu 18 year? Anyway, she is working off her frustration at them stopping her from bringing her own drinks with her."
Biondetta Shiroyama.
And the White Queen.
The rioters pouring into the runways were ordinary people, but they would not show up here for no reason. The world was unaware of the Summoning Ceremony, but they were still being subconsciously crushed by the pressure of the White Queen and Colorless Little Girl. There may have been so many rioters here because some half-formed sixth-sense had informed them of the Queen's presence nearby.
If the Colorless Little Girl broke loose after storing up power in response to the cocoon, the world would end. It was no surprise that the people with more sensitivity to such things would break first.
"Down with the Queen, is it?"
The silver twintail girl repeated their words while looking out the window and rubbing together the thighs sticking out from the bottom of her short casual dress.
Yes, if they just wanted a quick resolution so they could escape the pressure, it made sense for those ordinary rioters to attack the White Queen, who was the weaker of those two powerful beings. Just like a gas pipe rupturing at its weakest point. Of course, they could only attempt something so reckless because they were unaware what they were doing.
Even a weakened dinosaur was still a dinosaur.
It was obvious what would happen to the fool who thought they had a chance just because it was lying down on the ground.

Biondetta (who wore her chest-accentuating waitress uniform even on the plane) shrugged.
“Honestly, I say just let the rioters and knights do their thing. If we do much of anything around here, Kyousuke is going to find about it somehow or another. This is Toy Dream 35, so we’re already on his home turf.”
<It would be bad to run into him now. *Especially if we had attacked some vessels he once protected.* He would probably mistake it for some strange cruelty by the White Queen.>
Shigara Masami chuckled at the thought, but the White Queen’s bare shoulders jumped a bit. Biondetta found it unusual for the Queen to be shaken – in other words, to appear hurt – by the words of someone other than Kyousuke. The dangerous part was how she might just summon a downpour of spears if someone mentioned a delay due to weather.
<What should we do?>
“Let’s find a way to slip out of here.”
They viewed this differently than the pure and innocent Kingdom F knights. As a demon, Biondetta was skilled in using bluffs, tricks, and detours to grant people’s wishes.
Luckily, an announcement told them the plane had decided to have the nearly 300 passengers disembark immediately. It might seem odd to send them outside where the rioters were, but airplanes were built to be light and so their hulls were surprisingly flimsy. Large passenger planes had their engines exposed and the fuel tanks were located on the thin main wing. The flight crew feared the worst if the rioters surrounded them and trapped everyone inside. An explosion was not out of the question.
“This way.”
But with her tail flipping behind her, Biondetta did not guide the other two toward the plastic escape slide the other passengers were using. Instead, they used the confusion to slip into the off-limits cargo area. One reason for this was to retrieve her silver Blood-Sign (“How careless of them to overlook that I can use it as a gun!”) and her animal vessel which was being handled as a pet. The second reason was…
“Where is it? Oh, found it. This is the wheel storage space!”
This was the place that Hollywood liked to use and that had had led to much debate: “You could sneak into the plane through there.” “No, you’d be caught in the gears and killed if you tried.” “No, no. You could totally do it.” “The hell you could!” “Oh, you wanna fight!?” At the moment, the wheels were out and the plane was stopped on the runway, so the storage space’s door was open. Biondetta, Shigara Masami, and the White Queen used the thick shaft to climb down onto the runway separate from the ordinary passengers.
<Be careful, Queen.>
“Hm? I really don’t think anything could harm me.”
<Not that. I can see right up your dress!>

The cicadas were crying, but this was not the time to enjoy the summer atmosphere. At an airport, the cicadas could easily get sucked into an engine and cause problems.
There was a good reason for moving away from the other passengers.
“That fear and chaos is infectious. The passengers were separated from it by the plane’s hull, but now that they share the same space as the rioters, they might be *infected* and join in.”
<Thanks for the explanation. But I really wish you had paid more attention to our surroundings.>
“Yes, I see them.”
Just as the white dress and bare legged White Queen said that, some silhouettes stepped out from behind the passenger plane’s giant tire. More and more of them appeared as if they were duplicating.
They formed groups of two.
And one member of each group held a skinny stick measuring 150-200cm long.
Shigara Masami sighed in her suit and lab coat.
<What do you think?>
“All but one pair is a bluff. They’re probably extras hired with some money. But guinea pigs know the risks when they agree to participate in the experiment.”
Summoners and vessels with a certain number of Awards would disappear from the memories and awareness of normal people when outside their line of sight, but contact could be maintained as long as they remained in that line of sight. And from the moment the battle began to the moment they were literally killed instantly, they would have no clue what kind of world this was. Biondetta herself had used a gadget known as Girl’s Backdoor to mess with Kyousuke.
Because they all acted at once, their opponent could not tell who the real summoner was.
If they were using a bluff like that, this summoner would be the quick-attack variety that ended the battle with their first strike. That meant a battle between the lowest level of Regulation-class, but if that was enough, that was enough. And that meant they would have trouble with a longer battle.
Biondetta shook her waitress uniform’s miniskirt and unfolded her collapsible Blood-Sign she had retrieved from the cargo space.
“In Toy Dream 35, there was someone from Illegal who sounded like an expert in this sort of thing. Illegal Award 891,
Puppet✝Theatre✝Crime✝Device.”
Down with the Queen.
Was this a summoner and vessel who had succumbed to the pressure despite understanding the Blood-Sign System?
The rogue summoner was a lot like a lunatic being controlled by the extraterrestrial signal beaming into their brain.
The White Queen rubbed her index finger against her temple.

“The panic has reached a puppeteer too? I kind of feel sorry for the poor people drawn in by money without anyone explaining the danger.”
“Queen, the incidents caused by you and your worshipers were a lot like that.”
All of them used identical movements to pull out some kind of round sphere. Needless to say, these were Incense Grenades. Upon seeing them, Biondetta clicked her tongue and the White Queen frowned slightly. A fight here was fine, but opening an Artificial Sacred Ground and summoning a Material would draw the attention of the Kingdom F knights fighting on the runway. And it would all fall apart from there.
The White Queen sighed once.
She tugged down on the bottom of her casual dress which was shorter than she had thought.
She did not swell out with muscles or anything, but the pressure grew enough to make people imagine something was growing from her slender body. Even lying down, she was still the Queen. In fact, *she could not afford to hold back* at the moment. Whether to indicate that simple fact or not, she tilted her head and thought for a moment, so Shigara Masami reached out a hand to stop her.
<Don’t worry.>
The ponytail woman smiled.
And then something happened.
There was a deafening boom and then a single person was blown back from the crowd of people.
But not from one of Biondetta’s bullets.
When the lab coat researcher flicked “something” with her thumb, it flew forward with the force of a gunshot, hit her target right in the forehead, and gave them a concussion. Once the precariousness of their situation finally dawned on them, the many extras scattered and fled. The woman had apparently been correct, but despite Biondetta’s expertise in trickery, she had no idea how the woman had figured out which one was the real summoner.
The waitress demon had only figured out what had happened after seeing them lying on the runway.
It was a sunflower seed.
This was not even a part of the Blood-Sign Summoning Ceremony. But the idea of ending the battle before summoning a troublesome Material seemed like the foundation and origin point of Kyousuke and Biondetta’s fighting styles.
<Illegal Award 891. Well, you probably could have made a fair amount of money in *a more peaceful era*.>
Shigara Masami winked while she took some food from a small container and gave it to the small squirrel-like animal that crawled out from the neck of her lab coat.

<But unfortunately, I am Freedom Award 3000. If you want to challenge me in the Summoning Ceremony, at least reach the same number of digits first☆>

Part 8

On the border of Eastern Europe's Kingdom F, there was a never-ending and very ominous sound of something thick being bent. This may have been what someone would hear if they could directly witness a continental plate being bent.
"It's incredible seeing it for myself."
A researcher in glasses and a lab coat sat inside a large transport helicopter slowly circling the site of the cocoon.
Her name was Maria Heartocean.
She was technically a Government summoner, but her specialization was actually in developing the largescale devices known as Boxes. There was of course only one reason she had been called here.
"It appears to have a diameter of about 7km at the moment."
They could no longer fly directly above the cocoon.
7km was passing the max altitude for the transport helicopter.
Kingdom F had always been a natural fortress surrounded by mountains on all sides. From this vantage point, it looked something like someone had stuck some medieval European cities in a giant crater. But one side of that was being gradually crushed by the cocoon. At this rate, the entire crater would be obliterated.
(But we can't wait that long anyway.)
The cocoon was the White Queen's battle costume, but it still had a limit. It looked stable at the moment, but that was only because the battle costume's incredible defensive power was containing the massive amount of energy inside. But what would happen once the dam cracked? In the worst case, this could form a black hole that would swallow up the entire solar system.
"Where should we begin?"
(Of course, I was really sent here to make sure no one tries anything rash.)
She did not even try to hide her exasperation when she saw the other staff members growing over-excited with an odd sense of justice.
There was only so much they could do.
It really came down to extending the time limit as much as possible. That and helping restrain those with weaker wills. For the people who were itching to take action, being told to wait would only make the pressure harder to bear. They knew this was doomed to fail, so they would want to trigger that failure themselves so they could watch the world go up in

flames. The wannabe heroes would never admit it themselves, but that was the truth of the matter.
Maria knew exactly who really stood in the spotlight, so she breathed a gentle sigh.
(If I mentioned that name, the world police would probably move out in full force to arrest him. And I hear he did fight back against Government right around here.)

Part 9

Surrounded by a rhythmic shaking, Shrine Maiden Meinokawa Aoi spoke loudly as if to break through the stagnant air of that lazy midday.
“Yawn, so we’re finally on the move.”
After holing up in the cruiser for so long, Kyousuke had pinned a bunch of documents to the wall of the cabin. He had attached all sorts of colorful strings and pins to each one, viewed the entire arrangement over and over, and worked to desperately figure something out. He had gone without any sleep. Once his engine had been fired up, there was no stopping him. That was just the way he was.
And *this* appeared to be the result it had led him to.
The seats were made to swivel and move depending on how crowded the train was. At the moment, the two-person seats lined either side of the car like in a bullet train. Aoi had taken the window seat and she kicked her feet in a childish way that looked out of place on a shrine maiden with a white sarashi tight around her chest.
“It’s not a real train trip without a bento! And not some bread or a sandwich. A train bento has got to have rice!!”
“I have to admit I didn’t expect the world’s oldest Joruri Method to get fired up over trains.”
“Hm? I welcome all new and unusual experiences.”
Aoi gave him a puzzled look with the ends of her chopsticks still rudely in her mouth. She may have been saying this was not limited to trains and she would enjoy just about anything since she lived in a cave no one ever visited. She must have noticed the tightness only after swallowing the food because she belatedly reached into the chest of her shrine maiden outfit and loosened the sarashi a bit.
“Although having the window open would have perfected the authentic train experience.”
“The A/C is good enough.”
“But the authenticity!!”
Their destination was much closer than Aoi’s hometown of Houbi Village which required taking the high-speed Ultraloop and several regional trains. Just the one rapid train was enough. The bento that Aoi so treasured had been bought at the large station at Toy Dream 35. It was a normal seaweed bento with some fried fish and chikuwa tempura, which was not particularly

rural, but Aoi did not care as long as it felt right. Perhaps eating it with someone mattered more than the bento itself.
“So we’re searching out your past, are we?”
“The White Queen is obsessed with me and only me. She ignored me over the past two weeks when she could have attacked and killed me at any time. That means she has no business with me in the present.”
“So she has business with your past?”
“Assuming it isn’t my future,” spat out Kyousuke. “If we can trust the Government information from Aika and Illegal information from Lu-san, then there are no signs of movement at the remains of the Queen’s Miniature Garden. Based on that, we can guess she is digging even deeper into my past. That means the part of my past that was erased from this world by her.”
He paused there.
This was about his own roots.
But he still resumed speaking.
“I’ve never actually gone back there. I never had a reason to.”
“…”
He had no hometown. No, he had not needed one.
How did that sound to Aoi who had been kept deep behind Houbi Village’s Meinokawa Shrine as an object of worship, even if she did find that fact irritating at times.
The train rushed right past an intervening station.
The angry shouting and yelling of a large group passed by with the distortion of the Doppler Effect.
“Down with the Queen, hm?” said Aoi. “It’s the same no matter where we go. What a waste of a summer break.”
“Train stations are always crowded.” Kyousuke did not seem interested in that. “Stopping the Colorless Little Girl requires stopping the cocoon’s expansion and that requires defeating the White Queen. So it’s simple. We just have to return to the starting point.”
Those people were being manipulated by the words, but they made no sign of approaching the meaning behind those words. Meinokawa Aoi looked just like the White Queen, but no rioters rushed at her while she ate her bento by the window. They talked about the Queen, but they had no idea who the Queen was.
A small group of high school girls was gathered near the car’s door. They were all viewing the same phone and they seemed to be watching a video. Kyousuke could hear the strange melody of the Down With the Queen Dance that used an odd fusion of styles to create a summery sound.
Meinokawa Aoi looked around in annoyance while drinking from a small bottle of tea.
“So what are these roots of yours, boy?”

“Not even I know the whole story,” he admitted. “It goes back to Doctor S. You must have seen him at Houbi Village. You would have been attacked first.”
“You mean that cruel researcher with the oxygen mask?”
She looked annoyed in a different way now, so Kyousuke smiled bitterly. Outside perspectives could sometimes be almost too accurate.
“He was apparently a fairly well-known researcher in the field of the Blood-Sign Summoning Ceremony. *As a researcher*, he would probably have been ranked similarly to Shigara Masami if not a little higher. In July of 1999, he was part of the research group that first successfully summoned and measured the White Queen with real data. So without him, this world would not be overflowing with Materials like the White Queen. The residents of the other world would remain in that world.”
“You’re running through this pretty quickly, but doesn’t that make him one hell of a monster!?”
“He was only one step along the way. There’s no point in acting shocked when he’s already been defeated.”
Meinokawa Aoi had been designed several centuries ago to look just like the White Queen.
Yet Doctor S’s group had been *the first in the world* to contact her in 1999.
It might seem that did not add up, but there were two theories for how it could work out. The first was that, before anyone had clearly opened that “door” to contact her, there had been humans who had received inspiration from the other world through channeling and other occult means. The second was that all of history had been rewritten (just like for Kingdom F) at the moment Doctor S had contacted the White Queen.
There was no objective way of proving it one way or the other.
With the exception of an extreme singularity like the White Queen, only someone who had been expelled from history could view it from an outside perspective.
For example, the person who had freed herself from the title of the Rainy Girl.
“Doctor S managed to partially contact the White Queen, but he could not precisely control her. And the formulas for the Blood-Sign Summoning Ceremony had already been established, so further messing with them was bound to cause it all to collapse. So what was he working toward? It’s simple. He wanted to strengthen us humans so we could use the Summoning Ceremony.”
“…”
“It’s like finding a flaw an airplane’s design that prevents it from flying, but then giving it a much more powerful engine to forcibly launch it into the sky. Reckless is the only word for it. That’s why summoners these days still can’t control the White Queen. Not that that means Doctor S has given up on the white he feels is just out of reach.”
That was how unstable the world was.

It had been launched into the air with no thought given to landing.
It was desperately keeping itself airborne while unable to stop flaws from cropping up.
“Come to think of it, you mentioned something about your past I didn’t understand back when you were lying around in your cruiser,” said Aoi. “Something about trying to build an elite summoner in an ordinary home.”
“Not even I know the specifics since I can’t even remember what my own family members looked like.” Kyousuke breathed a heavy sigh. “I imagine it started out as a perfectly sterile lab much like the Queen’s Miniature Garden.”
He gave his thoughts on the matter.
“I don’t know if the first specimen was a success on the skills front, but at the very least, they must not have reached the point of being practical. A sterile lab is too twisted a location, so if a monster raised there was released outside, I doubt they could bear the various stresses of the real world. Focus is everything in the Summoning Ceremony, so noise, smells, people’s eyes, insults, and plenty of other things can distract you. The protective circle might keep out germs and air pollution since they distance the summoner from all causes of death, but that means non-deadly stressors will pass right through it. My guess is that first one ended up self-destructing. The stress of being fired on by a cannon can damage the heart or stomach even if the actual shell doesn’t hit.”
“And then?”
“Whether it was a success or failure, he would have established some kind of methodology. So the next step for Doctor S to overcome was applying stress to his guinea pig to bring them to a practical level. So instead of an ideal sterile environment, he would have tried using a lab with an intentionally inferior environment. You can think of it like taking an assault rifle constructed in a military lab and seeing if it can be produced in regional factories.”
An ordinary home.
Perfectly normal household items.
Doctor S had reproduced the lab work there. It was simple enough to say, but it was a lot like adding a special program to a juicer or food processor to use it as a centrifuge for enriching uranium. Because it used perfectly normal things, finding a successful methodology and spreading it around the world would have prevented anyone from monitoring its spread. Government, Illegal, and Freedom would be powerless in the face of a threat like that. It went without saying what would happen if summoners on Kyousuke’s level started popping up all around the world.
Of course, Doctor S had not cared at all about the balance of the world. He had helped create the Blood-Sign Summoning Ceremony, so no one could tell him how to use it. He was not going to listen to those major powers who had shown up later on, started using the techniques he developed, and took on the title of managers.

Aoi's hunger must have been fading because she held her chopsticks more elegantly than before. The chopsticks hovered over her bento without actually grabbing anything.
"But that collapse never happened," she pointed out.
"It's simple."
There was no naïve optimism in his words.
His constant failures and losses may have all been a result of the White Queen.
What kind of life would you live if you constantly challenged someone who would always win? Nothing could be more obvious. But he had never given up and that was how he had lived a life no one else could emulate. He was not some spoiled brat who was simply satisfied with the title of strongest.
"Doctor S still failed to control her. He underestimated his experiment with the Queen and it all fell apart. Just like someone who blows themselves up with the nuclear material they enriched. Or maybe I should put it like this: the specimens that Doctor S hoped would act as a safety device were utter failures."
"You need not look down on yourself like that."
Aoi reflexively rejected that assessment, but then she realized something. She frowned and asked about it.
"Specimen*s*?"
"Yes," readily admitted Shiroyama Kyousuke. "He may have had difficulty getting public funding and equipment after the spectacular failure in the sterile lab. Or maybe succeeding without any kind of public support was how he thought he could prove the methodology could be reproduced by anyone. At any rate, he intended to use up all of his children in that experiment. Thus, specimen*s*. I never said I was his only child, did I?"
"Well, no. But still…"
"Remember who I said I couldn't remember? And this is more than just amnesia. My guess is the White Queen caused too much damage to the world itself."
He paused for a beat.
And then he said it.
"I had a little sister."

Part 10

Meinokawa Aoi felt short of breath despite not having to breathe.
She was made to look just like the White Queen. She could follow the Queen's thoughts and logic as far as was necessary to play that role.
And with that in mind, what word did the White Queen always use when referring to Kyousuke?
Brother.
In hindsight, that made no sense. Everyone had given it a pass because no one expected to understand a superior being like the White Queen. But, but, but. Didn't that word hold crucially important meaning in the context of what Kyousuke had just said?
"…"
"W-wait, boy."
She spoke as carefully as someone holding unexploded ordnance.
Kyousuke fell silent with a troubled look on his face, but then he looked to the side.
And a moment later, he hugged Meinokawa Aoi like she was a stuffed animal.
"Fwah?"
It was so unexpected her mind simply went blank.
Heat gradually filled the core of her mind and then her entire face grew pink.
Not even tightening the sarashi could have stopped the pounding of her heart.
"Fwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!???"
She just about dropped her bento.
Good news: The granny could still act like a young girl.
"Wait just a second, boy! What is the meaning of this!? Are you homesick!? Why did you invite me on this train trip!? Now that I think about it, why did I ever agree to that? There must be something wrong with my defenses to just agree to a trip alone with a young boy!"
But.
While Aoi blushed and stammered, Kyousuke's heartrate remained normal while he squeezed and relaxed his arms as if checking on something.
He was still holding her in his arms, but he spoke like he was checking on the contents of a test tube.

“Was it just my imagination?”

Part 11

And.
A bit back from Kyousuke and Aoi's seat, someone sat in a different seat rather than summoning a dragon or rivaling a stealth fighter.
She wore a short casual dress, her legs were bare, and she had silver twintails.
"……
……"
<Calm down, Queen. You mustn't let him provoke you!!>
"This is your *journey to learn what it means to be human*, remember? Try not to ruin it with some impulsive act."
The ponytail researcher and the waitress demon desperately stopped her while seated on either side of her. The end result was similar to how Kyousuke was clinging to Aoi. They were all pressed together.
And being shaken and touched like that may have been why a resentful voice escaped the White Queen's lovely lips. The struggle had caused her dress to ride dangerously high up on her thighs.
Her Majesty spoke with a tilted head and eyes like a dead fish.
"(But it makes no sense. No sense at all. Flirting with another girl deserves countless deaths, but Meinokawa Aoi was designed to look just like me. She might as well be me as far as appearance is concerned, but look at brother. He keeps rejecting me, so why is he all over that fake?)"
<Uh, oh. I guess such a deeply-held obsession can't be fixed in just a few days!>
However, the White Queen was fairly calm if you ignored the silver twintails wriggling like snakes. Normally, she very well might have summoned a dragon or rivaled a stealth fighter to chase him down.
But the Queen was showing restraint.
That was notable in and of itself.
<Still, this is pretty unbelievable. Does this mean *great minds think alike*?>
"Well, he is my brother."
<Yes, he is Kyousuke-kun.>
Kyousuke had to have noticed the cocoon and the Colorless Little Girl.
And they knew where his thoughts would turn then.
If the cocoon was the battle costume, then it could be dealt with by killing the White Queen that acted as its core.
Kyousuke and the Queen.

Which one would save the world?
Things remained relatively peaceful, but this had caught Shigara Masami entirely by surprise. She was not familiar with Doctor S's research. The nightmarish experiment that had transformed young Shiroyama Kyousuke into a precision-guided missile was wrapped in mystery, but this just threw another bombshell into the mix.
A little sister.
The scrunchie ponytail researcher thought about the girl in her arms.
The entire Unexplored-class was meant to restrain the White Queen. They had failed in that role, but it was said they were all female in order to match their target as much as possible.
But why did the White Queen have a form so similar to a human?
<…>
Shigara Masami's personality prevented her from getting hung up on some unexpected turn of events. She was Freedom Award 3000. She had gained that title as a result of seeking freedom at every turn, so she was not fixated on the pre-established harmony. If you did not celebrate the unexpected as a part of freedom, you could not reach her level.
"What we must do remains the same," whispered the White Queen in the two women's arms. "Either way, if I do not accept your presence and words, the cocoon will continue to grow until it reaches the 10km point and triggers a supernova-level explosion. And if the Colorless Little Girl releases her power to combat that, this planet and both worlds will be at risk. If I am to conclude that your interference was best for my and my brother's future, I must first see where he came from. That has not changed."
<You mean?>
"Yes, of course."
Even at times like this, she was still the White Queen.
She accepted the risks in a different way than Freedom.
"Let us continue this journey while staying just out of sight. If we do run across each other, I expect it will all fall apart, control of the cocoon will be entirely lost, and the Colorless Little Girl will break down, sending the world straight to its doom."
<…>
"In the end."
She slowly let out a breath and sank down into her seat.
She sadly rubbed her thighs together while whispering her thoughts.
"No matter what I do, I may be nothing but a threat to my brother. Even if I simply exist nearby."

Sinceria Report 03

By the way, Sinceria and Olivia were not on the same train as the others. Kingdom F's royal family still had something to do in Toy Dream 35.
"Shiroyama Kyousuke?"
"Yes."
Sinceria smiled as she answered a brown-skinned girl with short silver hair. The girl seemed a little too skinny and she only had bandages and golden decorations to cover her nudity. She and Sinceria were both leaders, but she was dressed very differently from Sinceria's blue dress and crown.
Her name was Sekurtiti.
She was the Tomb Priestess who led a group of tomb keepers with a connection to Egyptian Mythology.
However, she was not enclosed in a pyramid full of mysterious traps. This was a floor of a skyscraper rising from the ocean in Toy Dream 35. It looked like a cross between an apartment and an office, so it had an industrial air conditioner and a water cooler. Also, everyone there had mobile phones.
Ever since being invited inside, Olivia had been looking curiously around. What was she thinking while viewing the pamphlet for a museum's Egyptian Mythology exhibit or a computer displaying a 3D pyramid created using VR mapping?
Sekurtiti's group saw the location of the pharaoh's slumber as the home of the tomb keepers, so they were not insistent on a traditional look. Their priority was ensuring their culture and civilization did not die out. That was why it was so important for them to maintain a relationship with a global entertainment company like Toy Dream.
Their brown leader wrinkled her beautiful brow.
She looked troubled.
"My feelings are complicated. It was thanks to his assistance that we confirmed the location of President Toydream's Founder's Gallery and were blessed with an opportunity to learn of its true meaning. But at the same time, the later events led to President Toydream's downfall. I do not know how directly Shiroyama Kyousuke was involved in that, but it would not have happened without his actions. Although you may not care much about our reasons when Kingdom F was the one being attacked."
Sekurtiti was aware Toy Dream had spread the Blue Film as a way of pushing the world's largest army into a war that would have destroyed

Kingdom F. That had needed to be stopped. She knew that intellectually, but people's hearts were not always so understanding.
There were personal feelings between Sekurtiti and Shiroyama Kyousuke. But her connection to Former President Toydream was related to her duty as a tomb keeper to preserve the pharaoh's mummy and possessions.
"In that sense…"
The bandaged girl thought for a bit and then responded.
"I think Shiroyama Kyousuke is a summoner who acts on personal emotion rather than the fate of the world or the future of the human race. But in addition to that, I suppose you would say he has *a strong enough will to do what must be done*. He places great weight on personal emotion, but he does not let it compromise him. He would not hold back even if a familiar face turned out to be an enemy."
"I see."
It was true he had fought against old friends a few times before. Like Biondetta and Claude from his days in the Queen's Miniature Garden or like Sinceria's own daughter, Olivia.
Kyousuke truly wanted to fight the White Queen. He felt no hesitation there. Just like a good lawyer or trainer, Sinceria wanted to understand his weaknesses and flaws so she could give him the best possible advice.
So there was one thing that bothered her: that woman with a long black ponytail and a lab coat worn over a tight skirt suit. She had been a researcher at the Queen's Miniature Garden and, according to Sinceria's daughter, was actually a monster of a summoner at Freedom Award 3000.
"What if?"
"?"
"What if Kyousuke's teacher – someone he sees as a second mother – were to become his enemy? Could you say the same thing about him then?"
"I see it the other way around." Sekurtiti's response was not what long-eared Sinceria had expected. "I was in contact with him for a far shorter time than you, but I believe the time that began with Azalea and ended with Elvast was densely packed. That is why you came here to speak with me. I apologize if I sound conceited, but you are not looking at his true foundation. He is not an onion where you can hesitantly peel back layer after layer to find the beauty at the center. In fact, I would say the hostility is what lies at the very core."
"What do you mean?"
"The closer someone is to him, the more fiercely his hatred and fighting spirit burn when they betray him. Isn't that the kind of person he is?"
"The closer they are…the more he hates them?"
Sinceria gasped as she groaned the words.
She would be lying if she said the signs were not there. She knew fairly certainly that he detested Doctor S who had remade him into a precision-guided missile. At the very least, he was not fond of the man. Olivia had told her how merciless he had been when fighting in Houbi Village.

Sekurtiti nodded.
“If someone is directly linked to his past, he views them as a powerful enemy. If they have little to do with his past, he views them more lightly. For example, he took a lighter view of the Queen worshipers like Azalea and The Saint, but he took a much harsher view of Biondetta, Lu Niang Lan, and Claude who I believe have spent much more time with him. At the very least, he saw them as someone who could speak the same language as him concerning a certain individual.”
And what lay at the center of Shiroyama Kyousuke’s past?
What was at the core of it all?
“The White Queen.”
It was not Doctor S.
Brown Sekurtiti immediately pointed to someone greater than his father.
“That greater being has to have spent more time with him than any of us. Whether he wanted it or not, she has made him who he is. The closer a summoner or vessel is to her, the greater a threat he views them as. Government Award 1000, Elvast Toydream, who could summon her with 100% accuracy, is a good example. He has almost nothing in common with Shiroyama Kyousuke’s past as far as I know, but his close connection to the White Queen must have made him look like the greatest of threats.”
Of course, once the White Queen appeared on the field, it was obvious what Shiroyama Kyousuke would prioritize.
Because they had so much in common, he could not allow it.
Because of their close relationship, he could not ignore it.
(Shigara Masami.)
Sinceria gathered her thoughts while gulping and toying with her locket to calm herself.
She did not let anything show on her face because she knew she was a leader just like Sekurtiti. But if not for that, her face would have been tense with fear.
The cocoon came from the White Queen and the Colorless Little Girl came from Shiroyama Kyousuke.
If those two peaks clashed *to truly destroy each other*, no one could predict what would happen. He had always acted within the framework of “resolving some kind of incident”. That was likely his compromise with humanity. But now the White Queen and Shigara Masami, who he had trusted all this time, were his enemies. If he let loose and stopped worrying about the consequences, the resulting disaster might be greater than the easily-predictable doom from the cocoon.
The most dangerous element was the Colorless Little Girl.
But Shiroyama Kyousuke would likely reach for the unstable Little Girl if he needed to.
If a complete stranger reached for the White Queen, that would be no different from the other worshipers.
But this was different.

Shigara Masami’s presence had torn into his heart from a different direction than the White Queen or Doctor S.
And what *complications* would that result in?
(You seem to think you are a problem-solving counselor, but do you really understand what is happening here? That might be Pandora’s Box you hold in your hands.)

Facts

- Materials generally make destructive actions as masses of pure fighting instincts, but under certain special circumstances, they can fall into fear or a panic. They will avoid fighting when that happens, so the usual calculations using Cost and Sound Range go out the window. Discussing Divine-classes from the same mythology (like Odin and Fenrir) is simple enough, but caution is needed when crossing mythological boundaries, such as between Norse and Greek. Also, the White Queen causes some level of fear and panic in all Materials except for the Colorless Little Girl.
- Kyousuke triggered this panic with the meaningless action of detonating a new Incense Grenade with an Artificial Sacred Ground already open, but that will not necessarily work every time. It is a complicated issue involving the type and condition of the individual Material as well as the surrounding environment.
- Shiroyama Kyousuke and his *little sister* were the second generation of precision-guided missiles developed by Doctor S. The first generation was presumably created in a sterile lab and could not bear the ordinary stresses of the outside world, so the second generation was created in an intentionally inferior environment.

Stage 03: Not Even Coughing Up Blood Is Enough

“Help me.”
“Brother understands the true meaning of those words.”
(Stage 03 Open 08/22 13:30)
Not Even Coughing Up Blood Is Enough

Part 1

Kyousuke was not too surprised with what they found in this more rural area.
“Dowwwn wiiiith…theee Queeen…”
Below the fluffy cumulonimbus clouds, the train station area only had a shopping district with rusty shutters covering everything and a single giant shopping center that appeared to have absorbed all of the economic activity. A video production van must have been parked in the parking lot there because he could hear a cracked and dispirited voice from a speaker in that direction. The entire area had the desolate atmosphere of a summer festival where no one had shown up.
Toy Dream’s international revived city program had split the population into two groups: the metropolises flooded with lights that held year-round festivals as giant amusement parks, and the shadows that were not able to share in the festivities. This was clearly part of the latter.
And it was a truly hopeless situation *since they just had to go bankrupt if they wanted to share in those festivities.* If they worked hard to save money and actually managed to survive, they ended up like this. That was why Toy Dream’s charity work was often called an aerial bombing or invasion using the economy as a shield.
“Yawn.”
Aoi really stood out with her long silver hair, the white sarashi around her chest, and her shrine maiden outfit, but even with her hands on her hips, she did not gather much attention.
But that was because there was no one around.
The taxi boarding zone and the bus stop were both deserted.
Only the cicada cries were louder here. Was that due to the artificial-looking forests full of cedars and cypresses, or was it due to the lack of noise from Toy Dream 35’s ubiquitous parades and large LCD screens?
“This is incredible. The place feels like a video tape that’s been recorded over too many times. Is this really the home of Doctor S who brought the world one step away from disaster?”
“If you were developing a chemical or bacteriological weapon, would you really place your lab in the middle of a city of a million? I’m guessing a run-down and inconspicuous area was more to his liking. …And when you say video tapes, do you mean magnetic tapes? Even credit cards use chips nowadays.”

“Sigh, kids these days know nothing about atmosphere. I bet you don’t see spirit photos or UFO videos much anymore because no one uses film or tapes. Why would you take those away from me!? I always looked forward to those summer TV specials in my cave!!”
Hearing that made Aoi sound like part of a horror story herself. And large reels of magnetic tape were actually being used for backup systems in banks and such to prevent loss of data in case of an unexpected power surge or something. You know, those things you see in the background of giant robot labs in old tokusatsu shows or anime. If Aoi was to be believed, it was possible the tsuchinoko, mothman, and other unidentified creatures had moved over to that format for their exhibitionist needs.
Aoi held the back of her hand to her forehead, but more due to the bright sun than the sweat.
“So what do we do now? Is it still a fair distance away? It doesn’t look like there are any buses or taxis to use.”
“It won’t take that long. Doctor S would have used a lab far away from human civilization for the first generation. Maybe deep in the mountains or on a remote island. But if he wanted some level of human interaction and transportation options, he would not place his HQ in too difficult a location.”
“Is that how it works?”
“It’s within walking distance, so don’t worry.”
That said, the August sun was beating down on them.
As they walked along the shimmering asphalt, Meinokawa Aoi was quick to loosen her sarashi, grab the chest of her shrine maiden outfit, and fan herself with it. It was a perfect demonstration of the North Wind and the Sun. By the time they arrived, she might be soaked in sweat and looking quite indecent with her cheeks flushed pink.
“Phew, there really isn’t anyone around here, is there? Especially children. Even Houbi Village had more life than this.”
“It isn’t an abandoned ghost town or anything. But when it’s this hot out, all the kids are probably in their air-conditioned homes playing video games.”
“Everything I hear about modern children is so depressing.”
“You’re one to talk. My phone is full of icons for social games I certainly didn’t download, like this one where you launch balls with a rubber band or this one where you dig into the dirt to knock down towers. And let’s not forget all the in-game purchases I found charged to my account! What were you doing while hiding in my cruiser, you freeloader!?”
“Hey, you have no one to blame but yourself for taking so long to recover. It’s your fault for lying in bed instead of getting after me!! Heh heh heh. I still know how to act like a child! I’m young in body and soul!”
They sensed a definite change while discussing that.
All sounds had vanished.
Including the cicada cries that had been a constant companion.
Even the faint sounds of everyday life coming from the houses.

It was a deafening silence, like inside a cave full of stagnant air. Meinokawa Aoi looked displeased, so it may have reminded her of her shrine located deep, deep, deep belowground.
“This is different,” she said.
“It is,” agreed Kyousuke.
Aoi must have realized this was not the time to worry about the heat. She retightened the sarashi that acted as her vessel restraint as she said more.
“This mood of self-restrain makes cheerful voices feel like a taboo. But what are we protecting by suppressing our voices and preserving this mourning silence?”
The answer soon revealed itself.
The narrow roads of the residential district crisscrossed like a go board. Instead of apartments, these roads were lined with two-story houses and single-story houses with an otherwise identical design. It was like being inside a box of luxury chocolates or a house of mirrors that reflected the same image over and over again. It had to all be carefully maintained, but if you forgot to check the house numbers, it would be hard to tell where in the neighborhood you were.
And within all that, a single house stood out from the rest.
Even though it was the exact same design as the others.
“…”
It was a perfectly normal house with a concrete wall around it. It had a red roof, white walls, and a balcony on the second floor. It also appeared to have TV antennae for terrestrial and satellite broadcasts. There was a metal lattice door in front of the main entrance, although it did not look like it would do much to keep anyone out.
There was a nameplate next to the intercom.
It said Shiroyama.
“What is this?”
But Meinokawa Aoi had to question the *ordinary* house she saw.
Her artificial face tensed a bit.
Yes.
At the end of the mysterious experiment, the entire Shiroyama family had supposedly left.
And yet.
Aoi raised her voice nearly to a yell as she peeked over the concrete wall to view the yard.
“How long has it been left like this? I don’t actually have any scientific data to back up the folk belief that houses quickly fall into disrepair with no one living in them, but there is no way a house would look this pristine after nearly 10 years! None of the paint is peeling and the lawn looks mowed!”
“……
……”
But Shiroyama Kyousuke did not even so much as stir as she shouted from so close by.

He stood motionless in front of the nameplate while a gust of wind blew the humid summer air across him.
He had returned.
Returned to this deep layer that had been erased from the world's data.
This would change his thinking in some way. The recovery would begin here.
He thought he heard a click as some kind of circuit finally reconnected and the energy reached him once more.
The scene had not changed in a decade. If he wanted a logical explanation, he could assume that someone had been maintaining the place.
But he sealed away that weak opinion.
Since when did logic and common sense apply to the White Queen? Those things could be useful as a support, but binding his thoughts with them would only shorten his life.
So he knew what to say.
"Time must have been stopped here."
"…"
"This is a holy ground. These coordinates hold some kind of meaning to the White Queen as well. With her, distorting time and space should not come as a surprise. In fact, it's a little surprising we don't see the house flipped upside down or floating in the air."
Preserving the mourning silence.
The surrounding residents may have been bound by that subconscious reverence for a holy ground.
"Now, then."
He was back to his childhood home.
But it was by no means a warm place. He probably would have felt more attachment to a rotting ghost house. He looked up at his starting point which was like a small but mysterious labyrinth.
"Let's jump right on in and figure out what I can learn about my past and what it was the White Queen erased from the world. Should I wait for her here, or will the information here help me predict her behavior more accurately? *Who will acquire the most accurate information first?* Whatever the case, this house is sure to be the turning point."

Part 2

Research.
An experiment.
Shiroyama Kyousuke had repeated those words over and over again.
But Meinokawa Aoi looked puzzled when she stepped through the unlocked front door. What she found inside looked just like a normal home: a shoe shelf, a plastic tank of kerosene, a fire extinguisher, bundles of old newspapers, etc. There was no dust to be seen and that cleanliness was certainly unusual, but there were none of the mysterious beakers, test tubes, analysis computers, and monsters preserved in formaldehyde she had expected to see.
The only thing of real interest was the variety of shoes.
There were adult-sized leather shoes and pumps which likely belonged to Doctor S and his wife.
The athletic shoes smaller than her hand may have been Kyousuke's from back then.
But what about the other pair?
Those small pink shoes did not look like something Kyousuke would have worn, so who did they belong to?
"This was his lab."
But Shiroyama Kyousuke said something odd.
He pointed at the each ordinary item in turn.
"30 days of newspapers."
"Huh?"
"The kerosene tank has 10.295 liters remaining. The fire extinguisher, shoehorn, and umbrella stand form an equilateral triangle with 120cm sides. The umbrella stand has 8 umbrellas, which have 10, 15, 8, 12, 14, 13, 7, and 7 ribs respectively. The angle of the shoes, using Doctor S's right shoe as the center point, have a margin of error of +2, -3, +7, -15, -1, ±0, and -4 degrees. It all looks random at first, but it all carries meaning."
"What good is memorizing all that?"
"Nothing really," he readily admitted. "But if I tried to line the shoes up properly, he would get mad at me. He never told me what exactly he was hitting me for, so I had to memorize it all. He could turn anything into a weapon if he wanted to. When he grabbed something, I had to figure out how I could protect myself. I had to make sure I was hit hard enough to satisfy him but not enough to seriously injure me. But I couldn't get carried

away and fight back. If I did that, the beating would be two or three times worse than normal. The only way to survive was to make him feel like he had won."
The words that followed were truly shocking.
But that had been the norm here. An unheard storm of abuse had wreaked havoc in that closed household. Based on the size of the shoes, Kyousuke would have been 5 or 6 at the time. Domestic violence came in many forms, but a fist could do much more damage to such a small body. It was entirely possible it could have killed him.
And Doctor S was not just human garbage who could not control his emotions.
It had all been calculated.
Getting on his good side to avoid the violence had not been an option.
"Everything here was a symbol related to the various forms of invitation, awakening, and communication that form the base of the Summoning Ceremony. The most obvious example is the equilateral triangle, but everything else is the same. It all mattered: color, shape, number, straight lines, curved lines, even numbers, odd numbers, a group in alignment, a group with one or more items sticking out, etc. Doctor S never taught us anything. We had none of the answers, so it was like navigating a minefield in the dead of night. He apparently felt we would not actually absorb any of the information if he gave us a textbook and provided lectures."
Everything he had mentioned was just in the entranceway.
The living room would have a TV and stereo, the bath would have soap and a shampoo bottle, the kitchen would have knives and a cutting board, and the kid's rooms would have a study desk and bed.
Doctor S could turn anything into a weapon.
So Kyousuke had to understand everything in advance.
Intense did not even begin to cover it.
And Shiroyama Kyousuke was not done speaking. It did not end here.
"At first, Doctor S would beat me," he spat out the words. "But it didn't take long for him to figure out a more effective method. He realized I wouldn't cry even when he beat me. So every time I screwed up, he would beat my mom or my *little sister* instead. It didn't matter what I grabbed to prepare myself."
"…"
"I *really and truly* thought about killing him. Although I imagine he was trying to inspire those emotions in me so he could turn me into a precision-guided missile."
He stopped speaking there.
Suddenly, Shrine Maiden Aoi looked up. She had sensed a small presence in the living room beyond the opened door.
Was it a boy or a girl?
"Nh, nhh, nhhhh."

She peeked through the door and saw a small figure struggling with the lid of a clear bottle. It seemed to contain multicolored candies. She took a closer look. It was hard to tell with the bangs over their face, but it appeared to be a girl.
Someone else arrived from the dining room.
“Boy?”
“…”
The completed summoner did not respond.
This was not a physical presence, but Meinokawa Aoi did not even consider reaching out a hand to see if it would pass right through the young boy. But not because he was so obviously just an image. He seemed like a snow crystal. He was surrounded by an ephemerality that made her think he would melt away at a touch.
And having just heard that this boy had accepted being beaten as normal may have played a role.
“Hand it here, *****.”
“I can do it.”
“C’mon, I’ll open it for you.”
“No!! I can do it!”
This alone might have been a heartwarming scene. It made this feel like a lived-in place rather than a creepy ghost town or dungeon.
“Then place a handkerchief or something over the lid to help grip it.”
“Like this?”
“Ahh, not the chest of your clothing…well, I guess that’s fine. Now try turning it.”
“Nghhhhh…hyah!? Yes, it came off!!”
When the lid popped off, the candies nearly spilled out from the bottle, but she just barely managed to keep them inside.
The small girl reached into the bottle and pulled out a few round candies.
“Okay, you can have this one. It’s strawberry flavor. I got it out for you.”
“I see.”
“I’ll have strawberry too.”
“Keep that up and all the strawberry ones will be gone.”
“It’s fine because we match.”
Aoi spent a while just watching this meaningless but undeniably real scene. She saw them smiling and leaning against each other, so there must have been more than just despair here.
“Wah!”
She shrieked when the two of them dashed from the living room with the candies in their mouths and moved to the entranceway where she was. She had been hesitant to touch them because she did not know how it worked, but they came to her. She reflexively crouched down and held out her arms to catch them, but they passed right through her, put on their shoes, and left through the front door.
“So they’re only an illusion. Something like a 3D image.”

She sounded somehow relieved.
But Kyousuke’s response was different.
The information missing from his mind seemed to be pleading to him in some way.
For him, logic won out over sentimentality.
He viewed their surroundings instead of the small illusions themselves.
“The supernatural elements here are remnants of the White Queen, but does this mean those remnants just grew stronger?”
“Boy?”
“Be on your guard, Aoi. She must be nearby. If we defeat the Queen, we can stop the cocoon. And if we stop the cocoon, we can stop the Colorless Little Girl!!”

Part 3

The supernatural showed no hesitation.
Her journey to learn what it means to be human had begun in earnest.
Just before Kyousuke and Aoi cut across the living room in their outdoor shoes and moved out onto the small yard, the White Queen and Shigara Masami scrambled over the concrete wall.
Then they climbed up to the second floor balcony.
While they made sure they were not casting a shadow on the yard, a voice reached them through a machine.
“Wow, that was a close shave. But wouldn’t the normal choice be to withdraw? Why are you playing ninja with a two-by-four? You aren’t sneaking into a giant Edo-period mansion.”
<Do you see anything odd from there?>
“I’m not quite sure what you’re asking about, but the colors are scattering from time to time. It isn’t going to turn out that what you’re seeing and what I’m seeing are entirely different, is it?”
Biondetta was viewing them from afar and her half-exasperated and half-impressed voice entered their ears.
“Also, Queen, watch your dress again! How many times have I warned you about this!?”
“Oh, dear. How indecent of me.”
The balcony covered a few different rooms, but none of the glass doors appeared to be locked. The White Queen and Shigara Masami slid one of them open and disappeared inside.
“Your shoes.”
<Oh, excuse me.>
The ponytail researcher with a whistle dangling from her neck removed her shoes only after the Queen pointed out her bad manners. This seemed to be a child’s room. There was some writing equipment on the study desk and the floor was littered with toys like building blocks and robot action figures.
Something flooded in.
Something unbelievably large flooded into the White Queen.
“……
……”
No one could know for sure, but the feeling piercing the White Queen’s chest here may have been identical to the one Kyousuke had experienced in front of the house.

It was like recovering each individual piece of data from a broken album. And it was mixed with the vague fear that some of the photos or videos might be entirely unrecognizable.
“How nostalgic.”
The White Queen emotionally viewed everything in the room, but she did not touch any of it.
Almost like that would be breaking a powerful taboo.
<…?>
Shigara Masami’s attention turned toward the bed next to the wall.
But instead of a normal bed, it was a bunkbed.
That meant two people had likely used this room. A closer look showed that the writing equipment and toys were a mixture of boy and girl products.
But she also noticed something else.
<Sigils?>
Yes.
Even the inconspicuous wrinkles in the bedsheets had meaning.
<Tattva, tarot, the tree of life, the creation and consecration of magical weapons, the injection and accurate control of Telesma, the structure of a catacombs, the management of incense, the psychological defenses needed for astral projection, astrological magic circles, a conversion chart for the divinities of different mythologies and religions…and lastly, the rose cross. But this is not the traditional version with the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. This is a script and graphical interface for representing the human body and the world with the 26 letters of the English alphabet. Wait, does that mean what I think it does!?>
The bare-legged White Queen only smiled faintly in her thin casual dress.
They heard a small pitter-patter.
It was rhythmic, but far too light. So at first Shigara Masami did not recognize it as human footsteps.
A small figure ran by in the narrow hallway outside the bedroom’s open door.
She thought it was a small girl.
Poorly maintained hair was a sign of abuse just like cavities and dirty clothing. This girl had long bangs that hid her eyes, but she still looked somehow familiar.
And like the needle finding its way into the record’s groove, the illusion filled in another piece of the world’s missing data.
This image of the past might be even more critical for Shiroyama Kyousuke than that girl herself.
<Wai-…>
Shigara Masami hurried out into the hallway, but the small figure was nowhere to be found.
It had always been no more than a formless illusion.
“It all leads back to Doctor S.”
The White Queen slowly walked out into the hallway.

The strength in her gaze seemed greater than before. She looked like she had retrieved something.
“Since he worked to raise people capable of using the Summoning Ceremony, he must not have thought following the manual he had created would be enough. It might be the difference between a user tapping on an app and a programmer or engineer who fully understands the syntax within. At any rate, he tried to take the horribly complicated and confusing foundation behind the Blood-Sign System and drive it into his children’s minds. He was trying to create administrators, not users.”
<…>
There was no one in the hallway, but they still faintly heard some lively voices.
The voices seemed to be coming from beyond the storage closet’s door, but they sounded like adults.
“Yes, I want to watch the magical girl show.”
“You need to keep the volume down, *****. We don’t want him to hear us.”
The young siblings may have been snuggled up next to each other watching the 1seg TV built into an electronic dictionary or something. The bright and energetic voices and music coming from the TV accentuated the gloomy atmosphere in the children’s room where Shigara Masami stood.
“It may have seemed ridiculous. And in fact, simply using the service was enough to move between the world powers and reach Award 1000. Yet Doctor S wore down his children’s lives to drive that information into them. At first glance, it does look like wasted effort, doesn’t it?”
Words flowed out.
The White Queen acted like a purifying shrine maiden who conveyed someone’s lost words.
“But my brother was able to resolve so many incidents because he understood what was happening on the inside and was not just using the service. My many worshipers broke down the Blood-Sign System and remade it into a grotesque ceremony to permanently summon me, but he immediately saw right through it because he accurately understood the program running at the foundation of the app.”
<Is that really the answer?>
“What do you mean?”
<You said Doctor S thought his Blood-Sign System could not fully control you. So he attempted to strengthen the humans using it instead of trying to complete the system and likely breaking it in the process.>
Shigara Masami had to have been overwhelmed by this small house.
It was a holy ground. It carried more weight than a giant temple on the ocean floor.
She chose her words carefully.
<Did Doctor S hope they could teach him a unified theory that went beyond the Blood-Sign System that had hit a dead end and could not be completed? So he drove all the foundational materials into his children like they were a

witch's cauldron and he waited for the magic potion to be made. It started as an unpredictable mixture of random ingredients, so he just had to pray a miraculous combination would rise to the top.>
"That is a rather fanciful interpretation, but if that were the case, he would have used more specimens. He would have gathered a thousand or even ten thousand children."
<But in a way, Kyousuke-kun was a success.>
"?"
<The Colorless Little Girl Dedicated to a Single Goal (aie – a – oio – ei – ueo – ioa – e – uai – ee). He constructed a concrete method of killing you, which could also be used to threaten you into obedience.>
"I see," said the bare-legged White Queen in a white casual dress. "That is one way of looking at it."
However…
"But if that was what Doctor S wanted, I imagine he would have worked to build it himself. If you ask me, it is most accurate to say my brother ended up growing beyond Doctor S's expectations."
<Beyond his expectations?>
That was important, but the preceding words were even more curious.
<He *ended up* growing?>
This oppressive home was enough to know that Doctor S had been a crucible of malice in human form. Shigara Masami had led the Queen's Miniature Garden which had gathered unfortunate children from around the world, but even she was overwhelmed by this. This small house was even deeper, darker, and heavier than that shelter constructed deep underground. The Miniature Garden had been equipped with everything necessary for a normal life. The children had been able to swim in the pool, eat cake, and smile together. But it felt like this house would cause a normal person's soul to rot away if they so much as breathed in its air.
The White Queen breathed an exasperated sigh while tugging down the short hem of her casual dress.
As if to say that boy would not just take it if he were thrown into an artificial hell.
"Have you forgotten?"
<Forgotten what?>
As soon as she asked that, she heard that light pitter-patter again.
It was far too light to think it was footsteps.
A small girl entered the children's room. Shigara Masami gasped, but the girl must not have been able to see her.
"There we go."
The small girl climbed up to the top bunk and pressed her small palm against the ceiling. No, a square of the ceiling slid aside to reveal the attic space.
"A minicar, a ball, and an animal encyclopedia. They're safe now."
Shigara Masami tilted her head, so the White Queen explained.

“This house only contained the things Doctor S felt were necessary, so he would throw out everything else. Even if they belonged to my brother.”
<You mean she secretly stole back Kyousuke-kun’s discarded toys and hid them in the attic?>
“Yes. That must have been a part of life here. I imagine their mother drew Doctor S’s attention while she was digging through the trash.”
A boy called to the girl from the hallway.
The young girl quickly closed up the ceiling, climbed down from the bed, grabbed two cheap hair ties from the study desk, and left the room.
The siblings could be heard speaking in the hallway.
“My hair is in my eyes. Fix it.”
“What do you want?”
“I want twintails today!”
Shigara Masami was curious about the hallway, but the voices suddenly ended.
She gasped because she had not heard the footsteps leaving.
The source of the voices had clearly just disappeared. As if they had never existed in the first place.
The White Queen toyed with her own hair and sighed with an indescribable look on her face.
“Let’s get back on topic. It is true this was a lab for Doctor S to realize his ugly dream. My brother’s dignity was trampled on and his desperate resistance rang hollow as his mother and *little sister* continued to be beaten before his eyes. But do you really think every little thing went according to plan for that scum of a man? This lab was ultimately shut down, if you recall.”
<Ah,> said Shigara Masami in belated realization.
“You do not seem very familiar with Doctor S. But since all of the Miniature Garden children were given the name ‘Shiroyama’, I assume he had to have held an important position in that project you led.”
<To be honest, I did know Kyousuke-kun had been turned into a precision-guided missile. Queen, I also knew about the plan to assassinate you. But I simply could not figure it all out. Even at the top of all three major powers with Award 3000, I could not stop that giant organization from moving forward. I also never figured out how Doctor S had made Kyousuke-kun the way he was.>
However.
Until now, it may have slipped Shigara Masami’s mind because the past she saw here was just so raw.
But history revealed how it had all ended.
At some point, the experiment at the Shiroyama house had ended and they had withdrawn from here while disguising it as a family breaking up.
“Help me.”
The White Queen spoke a certain phrase.

It was a perfectly normal pair of words. It may have been even more ubiquitous than the “I’ll kill you” that felt like the catch phrase of delinquents everywhere.
But at times, that phrase carried meaning that outweighed everything else in the world.
“Brother understands the true meaning of those words. So no matter the environment or circumstances, he will not stop once he hears them. He will come running even if it means making an enemy of the entire world. If the incident at the Queen’s Miniature Garden was the trigger, than perhaps we should say this house was where the gun was cocked. It all leads back to here.”
Shigara Masami had thought the events here had already ended.
She had thought they were simply chasing the traces of a tragic past.
But the White Queen’s words changed things. What had young Shiroyama Kyousuke done? Had he fought back against Doctor S? And what had that meant for the mother and *little sister* whose faces he could no longer remember?
Had he won or lost?
Day in and day out, Shiroyama Kyousuke had continued to sharpen his fangs while tasting humiliation in his pursuit of that phrase when it was spoken in complete and utter distress, but had he been successful here or not?
<What did…?>
Shigara Masami felt like she was finally opening Pandora’s Box.
She gulped and completed her question.
<What did Kyousuke-kun do to Doctor S???>
But just then…
“Gah, red alert!! Get out of there! You need to get out of there! Kyousuke-chan and his vessel moved back inside and I can’t see them through the first floor windows. They’re probably climbing the stairs to the second floor!! You can’t run or hide in that cramped house and your *journey to learn what it means to be human* is over if he finds you!!”
Biondetta’s warning stabbed into their eardrums through their earphones.
The holy ground’s atmosphere was shattered instantly.
Shigara Masami grimaced and the White Queen’s shoulders relaxed somewhat.
“Let’s end it here.”
<But…>
“I have all the information I need. And we did not come to view these traces of the past in order to reveal the truth. That is only the means to an end. If I run into my brother here, it all falls apart. I must avoid that at all costs.”
<…>
Shigara Masami could hear the creaking of the stairs. The footsteps had real weight to them, so these were not tiny illusions climbing the stairs.
The ponytail researcher bit her lip, hesitated, and then made up her mind.

<Okay, fine. We can continue this later.>
They were quick to action.
The White Queen and Shigara Masami cut across the children's room and prepared to climb onto the balcony railing that did not have a hint of rust even after a decade.
Sensing someone's eyes on her, Shigara Masami looked back and saw a small girl looking at her from the children's room.
No, the girl would not actually be able to see her.
No matter how clearly abused she might be, reaching out a helping hand would accomplish nothing.
<~ ~ ~>
The researcher squeezed her eyes shut as if shaking free of something.
She faced the White Queen once more and the two of them jumped from the balcony.
"Queen, the wind is pushing up your dress!!" warned Biondetta.
"Oh, pardon me."
After landing in the yard, they climbed over the concrete wall. And then…
<Wait, what?>
Rain poured down on their heads like from an overturned bucket. They looked up and saw thick and dark rainclouds. They also heard the intermittent rumbling of thunder.
Sudden downpours were common in midsummer, but that was not enough to explain this.
The sky had been clear as could be just a moment before.
"The sun," said the White Queen with her soaked casual dress clinging to her skin.
Only then did Shigara Masami notice the overall coloration of their surroundings.
It was dusk.
The dark clouds overhead added to the darkness, but the sun's position in the sky made no sense. And this rainfall had not just started. In fact, it looked like it was starting to let up. The orange of sunset managed to pierce through some gaps in the clouds.
Shigara Masami forgot all about the rain hitting her as she muttered in disbelief.
<But we only spent a few minutes in there. All we did was check the children's room, right?>
"The flow of time can grow stagnant in places. You must have known that. We should count ourselves lucky that we did not find a few centuries had passed when we left."
<…>
"Heyyy," called Biondetta. "You're really starting to worry me, so could you at least tell me whether you're alive or not?"
They were afraid to ask.

It was raining outside and sunny inside. So how had Biondetta kept a consistent image in her head while she watched them from afar?

Part 4

Meinokawa Aoi and Shigara Masami were not actually the only ones interested in Shiroyama Kyousuke's *little sister*.
It was 6PM, making it evening.
The cicada cries were shifting to the evening cicadas. As desolate as everything looked, the area was still quite warm. The night would almost certainly be a sweltering one.
"Oh, my. It seems the legends about Japanese government offices closing early were true."
Sinceria, ruler of Kingdom F, elegantly placed a hand on her cheek when she learned she would have to wait. And what she did next went without saying.
"Via, don't forget your straw hat."
"Ugh, but it makes my head too hot."
"C'mon, make sure you get plenty of water. C'mon, c'mon."
"What is with you, mom? You've been all over me for a while now."
Just then, the mother's long ears heard a quiet sound. Rachel had tapped the window twice with a flathead screwdriver. She did so right next to the internal lock. The spider webs of cracks intersected and she skillfully removed a small triangle of glass.
After unlocking the window in a way that showed she knew exactly what she was doing, the knight in silver armor and a tight skirt turned back toward Sinceria.
"You may enter now, my queen."
"I know I asked you to do this, but the civil war really changed you, Rachel. You used to flatly refuse to do anything that violated your idea of chivalry."
"I realized it is a knight's duty to sully her own name if it will help Kingdom F."
"That phrasing is a bit worrisome, though."
The ruler in a blue dress managed to look graceful even when she was breaking in through a window.
This was the city hall of a rundown rural city.
Since the employees had gone home, the air conditioning and lights were off. It was the worst possible venue for experiencing Japan's sauna-like weather.
Olivia gulped down a bottle of carbonated water in an insulating cover before asking a question.

“So we can find Onii-chan’s secrets here?”
“If I am correct about something, yes. We must understand his weaknesses and flaws if we are to give him good advice.” Sinceria raised a finger while walking gracefully through the city hall. “Doctor S established a small lab in this rural city while disguising it as a normal family. Setting aside whether that experiment was a success or failure, he eventually withdrew by making it look like the family broke apart and skipped town.”
“What does that matter?”
“That means he did not go through the proper procedure for a change of residence. When a house is abandoned, an alert is carefully preserved to prevent any legal trouble later on. Which means…”
Long-eared Sinceria had snuck into the document storage room.
“I imagine the certificate of residence and family register are still here.”
This incident existed on such a ridiculous scale that the White Queen had erased the data from the world, but since she had not intentionally concealed it, there was a good chance that erasure had not been very thorough.
The biggest risk was the possibility of them being declared dead in absentia because enough time had passed since they went missing. That normally meant around 7 years, but in special cases such as a war or shipwreck, the declaration could be made in less than a year.
7 years.
Japanese high schools apparently did not allow students to skip years, so given Kyousuke’s age, that limit would have already passed. If a request had been made, he would have been legally declared dead and the certificate of residence would have been erased. If the government office knew they could remove the records for that empty house without any legal trouble, they would not have held onto the documents any longer.
However, that system generally only came into play when processing an inheritance, so that would not have happened unless someone made a complaint in family court. Simply put, it was all up to chance.
“Summoners and vessels with a certain number of Awards vanish from normal people’s awareness. Hopefully that is one more reasons that the documents were simply forgotten in here.”
“This might be a commuter town with a declining population, but I doubt they could store all their documents in paper.”
“Rachel, you handle the specifics.”
Everything was digitized in the modern age, but not all of that was available for access online. Certificates of residence could be printed off from a convenience store copier, but that did not mean you could just access anything you wanted by hacking in from a net café.
In the end, you could steal far more data by sneaking into the building the old fashioned way and accessing one of the internal computers.
Bespectacled Rachel did not use the old-fashioned and yellowing computer and keyboard. She instead attached her mobile device with a cable and used

that. That skipped the need for a username and password and it would not leave anything in the host device's access logs. The mobile device was originally meant to *mess with* Toy Dream who had indirectly attacked Kingdom F. It was extremely useful, but since other techniques were needed to sneak into the target facility, it was not all that attractive to normal hackers.
"Shiroyama, Shiroyama, Shiroyama… That seems to be a common name in this country."
"That is intentional. And we know the full name for one family member. Have you found Shiroyama Kyousuke?"
"Here he is," replied Rachel while displaying the result on the old monitor. Doctor S. Despite the impressive-sounding nickname, his real name was surprisingly mundane. So was Shiroyama Kyousuke for that matter. It was unclear if this was their real names or if they had all taken fake names so their "family" would not stand out.
It also listed the names of Kyousuke's mother and *little sister*.
However.
"Just their names? Are there no photos?"
"This is only a certificate of residence. A national ID card would probably have a photo, though."
"Rachel, search these full names on the external internet. Maybe you can find photos from a school event or a personal social media account."
"Understood, my queen. However…"
"Yes, I know."
Shiroyama Kyousuke had been 5 or 6 at the time. His *little sister* would have been even younger. They may or may not have even entered elementary school by that point and it was unlikely they would have had their own social media accounts. Insurance cards did not include photos and they would not have any kind of license at that age. There were cameras everywhere you went in the modern age and they would have been photographed at some point, but that was useless if there was no way to search for it.
But luck was on their side.
Glasses knight Rachel found something while searching through some regional community sites.
"Passports."
"Rachel?"
"It seems the shopping district ran a foreign travel program to get the residents of the commuter town to take a foreign vacation once a year. And even an infant less than a year old will have a photo on their passport. We can track them down like this!!"
"Well done. You have my praise as a queen."
Luckily, the ticket requests were made in the same building as the city hall. With the declining population and reductions in funding, they had likely been forced to run multiple public agencies from the same building to

reduce costs. That saved Sinceria’s group the effort of breaking into another building.
Once they walked to a different room and hacked into the computer there with Rachel’s mobile device, they finally found it.
They found Shiroyama Kyousuke’s *little sister*.
They found a photo of her face.
But despite finding the data they were looking for, Olivia frowned.
“Isn’t that…?”

Part 5

The cocoon had grown to 8km.
The world would end once it reached 10km.
It was hardly surprising some people were starting to think about the afterlife.
“There is nothing at all to worry about. This is the predetermined judgment. None of us have any reason to worry. If you have led a blameless life, then relax and wait for the time to come.”
“…”
“Praise be to the White Queen!! She waits for us beyond the gods and she is the one and only being who will save our souls!!”
Blue bikini Azalea Magentarain gave an annoyed look to the nun who was kneeling emotionally on the beach. Azalea was not the only person in Government’s secret prison on South America’s Devil’s Island.
The Saint.
Just like Azalea, that woman had been a Queen worshiper from Bridesmaid, but while Azalea had been freed from those bonds, the nun had not. Perhaps as a sign of her suppressed fear, she wore her habit despite the heat and she continually offered prayers to the White Queen with a glow of ecstasy in her eyes.
They had received a few reports from Maria Heartocean.
About the cocoon and other things.
“If you’re that afraid of dying, why not jump ship and worship the even-more-powerful Colorless Little Girl?”
“Do not be silly. No one is stronger than White Queen. Especially not some human-made Unexplored-class!!”
“It’s not like you know where the White Queen came from. If she was born from a normal human mother, then you might as well have just spat on her existence.”
“Not to worry. People make mistakes during our journey to find the right way through life. The White Queen is truly unfathomable, so she would never get angry over something so trivial!!”
The nun always had an answer.
Or rather, if she let her argument be defeated, she would be forced to accept a truth that terrified her.
The world would soon be destroyed.
And she did not hold a priority ticket to salvation.

(But when you get down to it…)
Which was the real danger: the White Queen or the cocoon?
The Colorless Little Girl had been created to oppose the White Queen and she had in fact defeated the Queen. It was hard to believe, but if you built a theory on that information, didn't it mean a threat greater than the Queen had been introduced to the world?
In the field of weaponry, you always struck back when outdone.
No one could hold a monopoly over a new weapon forever. Once they were used in battle, the enemy could analyze them, collect malfunctioning or damaged units from the battlefield, and produce weapons of equal or greater capability. When that process repeated, the lethality of the weapons would rise endlessly. You always needed something more powerful than your enemy. It was the same with grenades, poison gas, landmines, tanks, missiles, and everything else. That back-and-forth meant the developers could never stop working.
If the cocoon was a part of the Queen, the Colorless Little Girl would react to its growth.
That was on the assumption that Maria had found the correct answer, but it was apparently true that Unexplored-class had been built to kill the Queen.
"In theory, anyone should be able to summon the Colorless Little Girl if the conditions are right."
"What a vile thought. Who would want the power to harm the Queen!?"
"And yet I haven't heard of anyone other than Shiroyama Kyousuke succeeding. I would think at least *someone* would try it with the entire world boiling over like this."
Was that because she had been broken?
Or was there some other reason?

Part 6

“Nghghgghgh.”
“What is it now, Aoi?”
“We are in a stuffy business hotel eating ordinary convenience store bentos. This is supposed to be a trip, so where is the local color!?”
It was night.
Kyousuke and Aoi had left that house for the time being. That was partially because they were unsure what effects the distorted flow of time would have.
Aoi’s hair was wet because she was fresh from the bath and she was throwing a fit on the bed while wearing a starchy towel-material bathrobe with no logo on it. The difference in behavior from the train was likely due to growing accustomed to the excitement of the trip. It was like growing homesick for white rice and miso soup during the second half of a foreign vacation. Her fit was causing the bathrobe to slip out of place quite a bit. And while she was behaving very childishly, she did not seem to be wearing a sarashi or fundoshi at the moment.
They had been lucky enough to find this business hotel in a commuter town that had failed to become a tourist location or an office town. There were rarely any visitors outside of the local residents. Kyousuke had feared the possibility of having to spend a sleepless night in that small house that felt like a nightmare preserved in formaldehyde, so he was delighted with the hotel.
“Wait, is the pay-per-view broken on this thing!?” complained Aoi. “I inserted the card I bought at the vending machine!!”
“Is that what you call local color?”
It was the same as a convenience store or an online store. This business hotel chain had been built here even if it was guaranteed to lose money just because the company wanted their signs in every part of the country. Just like phone booths and mailboxes, they felt like a part of the public infrastructure.
“The biggest problem with this hotel is the lack of a hot spring. What is with that tiny bathtub!? You can’t even stretch out your legs! And the closest thing to ‘a view’ is the sink, the small mirror with the corner broken off, and the toilet! Argh, I finally got to leave that damp cave, so where is my moon-viewing sake!?”
“Can you even drink sake?”

“I have been running for hundreds of years, so surely you do not think I am too young. Besides, my entire body is fake!”
…He was more curious about why the humans who had made her had felt the need to make her so she could get drunk. Just like all the excess icons lined up on the desktop of a commercial computer, it felt like they had too much time left over and decided to add a bunch of unnecessary stuff.
Aoi used the bed springs to hop up, sat cross-legged despite only having a bathrobe to cover her nudity, and popped off the lid of the One Cup Yokozuna she no longer had a use for.
“Um, hey,” said Kyousuke.
“What!?”
“Isn’t that my bed? You were rolling around on the other one earlier!”
“Shut up, pervert boy. I’ll cover both of them with my scent and warmth and there’s nothing you can do about it!!”
Why did the world’s oldest look so at home with some convenience store sake in hand? Not many women could hold an unwieldy One Cup Yokozuna as comfortably as a middle-aged man at a horse-racing track. She also had convenience store edamame on the side table.
“Pwah… Now, then.”
“Yes?”
Aoi continued while her unnecessary functionality caused even her nape to flush red.
“Boy, are you sure you should have come all the way back to the station area? You made it sound like we could have lied in wait for the White Queen.”
“More than that, I’m pretty sure she was there with us during the day.”
“Bff!?”
Aoi spat out her sake (which actually had a pretty high alcohol content). She reacted like someone who had walked down a forest trail as a neighborhood association test of courage and then later heard a man-eating tiger had been on the loose after escaping from the zoo.
Kyousuke breathed a heavy sigh.
“Looking back on it, they’re probably on too high a level for most things. If we set up cameras and sensors all around the house, I bet they would slip right past them. We can’t hope to limit their options either, so we’ll have to predict what the White Queen and Shigara Masami are thinking.”
That put a terribly complicated look on Meinokawa Aoi’s face.
As a Joruri Method, she was not actually human, but…
“Predict what the Queen and that Award 3000 are thinking? Is that even possible?”
“We have no choice.”
If Shiroyama Kyousuke made his decisions based on what was possible or not, he would have given up on life and succumbed to the White Queen a long time ago. This was past the point of debating whether or not they could do it.

“What matters most is recovering the missing data about my mom and *little sister*. That house is definitely important in that regard, but staying there with nothing in mind won’t teach us anything. We need to know what to look for and where to look.”
“Then allow me to ask about something.”
“?”
“The White Queen is only interested in you. Since she has not appeared before you in the present, she must be interested in the data surrounding you instead of you directly. For example, your past. There was no sign of her trying anything at the ruins of the Queen’s Miniature Garden, so she must be focused on Doctor S’s research which predates that. And that means this commuter town that is barely noticeable on the map.”
“Yes? We’ve discussed all that before.”
“Now for my question: Why is the White Queen obsessed with you in the first place?”
She chugged the clear liquid.
With the chest of her bathrobe dangerously loose, she winked, raised a finger, and then pointed that finger at Kyousuke.
That Joruri Method was the spitting image of the White Queen and she asked another question to clarify.
“Or to put it another way: who is the White Queen?”
“…”
“A direct timeline is meaningless when talking about her. She could easily have rewritten the past after being born in the present, so I am going to risk suggesting a bold theory. Why does she call you ‘brother’? Or to put it more clearly, is the White Queen your *little sister*?”
That was the decisive question.
Silence reigned for a while.
Finally, Shiroyama Kyousuke sighed softly.
And he answered.
“No, that isn’t what this is.”

Part 7

Meanwhile, the White Queen was silently pressing the mouth of a paper cup against the wall. She was down on all fours and the way her casual dress clung to her figure was quite risqué when it came to her butt.
A girl in love was cutest when she somewhat lost control of herself!!
“……
……”
<Umm, I really don’t think that’s going to help pick up the sound. Scientifically speaking.>
Shigara Masami gently chided her while attaching the supplied coffee filter to her mug and pouring in water from the hot water dispenser.
The air conditioning was nearly dead, but when they tried opening the window, they found the night breeze to be chilly. They had expected a sweltering night after how awfully hot it was through the evening, so this was a surprise. Maybe because this was not a heat island. Thanks to that, they wanted something to warm their bodies. They always seemed to be regulating their body temperatures in one direction or the other.
<Biondetta-chan, how much sugar do you want?>
“It would be great if you could give me four sticks of sugar, three packets of milk, and then some cream, honey, caramel, brown sugar, meringue, and maple syrup. I would really like some coconut milk and orange peel to help bring out the summer flavor, but I will show some restraint.”
<Aren’t some of those pretty much the same thing? Like sugar and brown sugar, honey and maple syrup, or cream and meringue?>
“Don’t be dumb, you complete fuckhead!!”
<Oh, dear. Now you’ve said it. You shouldn’t talk like that to a woman, you know? And this coffee’s flavor changes dramatically depending on how you prepare it. I hope you’re ready for an ultra-bitter bomb as punishment!!>
Shiroyama Kyousuke should have considered it more rationally.
If this was the one business hotel in the rural city, then anyone visiting would naturally end up there. Most likely, Sinceria, Olivia, and the others from Kingdom F had a room there as well.
<The real trick to perfect coffee is adding a few drops of brandy.>
“Nothing good ever comes from giving you alcohol. How many times do you think I saw you curled up on the floor with a bottle of vodka back in the Miniature Garden?”
<Ehh? You don’t want to make something fancy like a café royale!? You put a sugar cube on the spoon like this, let it soak in brandy, and heat it with a lighter until there’s a blue ball of fire! Then you drop it into a cup of coffee and – kyah! – it’s so adult! Kyah, kyah☆>
“Queen, restrain that alcoholic before she sets off the smoke detector! Hurry!!”
Kyousuke’s mistake may have been thinking of them as supernatural beings. While Biondetta still counted as human despite modifying half her body with artificial bones, the other two would not starve to death just because they

had nothing to eat. But that did not mean they would be satisfied only eating fog and mist.
That may have been part of what it meant to *learn what it means to be human.*
The waitress demon bent her back in a way that pushed out her large chest, looked up, and gulped down a ridiculous amount of antibiotics like they were coffee milk after a bath.
“I’m surprised,” she said afterwards.
“?”
“That Kyousuke-chan had a *little sister*.”
“Is it that unusual? I know people like to go on and on about the low birthrate these days, but it isn’t like no one has multiple children anymore.”
“That wasn’t what I meant.”
Biondetta seemed unsure how to put it, so Shigara Masami cut in.
<That’s right. I let it wait because we had to avoid Kyousuke-kun, but who was that girl? And does it have to do with what you always say, Queen?>
“…”
<You always call Kyousuke-kun your “brother”, don’t you?>
Everyone would draw a connection between those two facts.
However.
“No.”
The White Queen breathed a heavy sigh after moving away from the wall. She seemed to have regained something when she entered that house.
“If that were the case, I might have been able to save him in some other way during those hellish days. But it is not the case. I am not Doctor S’s daughter.”
Shigara Masami and Biondetta exchanged a glance. They were clearly wondering the same thing.
Then who was that *little sister* seen in Shiroyama Kyousuke’s past?
Who was that girl from those painful memories? Who was that girl who had introduced something other than pain to those memories?
“You are looking at this wrong.”
The White Queen rejected the idea even further as if forcing them in the right direction.
Her journey to learn what it means to be human was gradually bearing fruit.
“We are pursuing data concerning my brother’s past, not data concerning his *little sister*’s past. Do not forget that.”
“Yes, but…”
<That’s right. I don’t think this is something we can just ignore.>
“Sigh.” The White Queen rubbed her temples with her index fingers. “Yes, I suppose she is bound to come up if we are following my brother’s past. But let me lay out the basic framework of that story: that house was Doctor S’s lab. Doctor S lived there with my brother, his mother, and his *little sister*. Doctor S followed his own manual to apply pressure to my brother and his mother and *little sister* fell victim to Doctor S’s violence in the process. My

brother already had the makings of what Doctor S wanted, so hitting him and beating him would not be enough to break him. So Doctor S instead beat the family members he cared for. All while laughing and saying it was his fault."
It was simple enough when spelled out like that, but the reality of it had to have been so much more sticky and horrific. Shigara Masami had trouble imagining it and she had directly stood in the rampaging White Queen's path to allow as many children as possible to escape the Queen's Miniature Garden. Researchers came in any number of forms, but Doctor S clearly lacked anything resembling human morals or brakes.
But that was not the White Queen's main point.
"So a question: where did my brother's hope lie during those unbearably hellish days?"
"Eh?"
That question shocked Biondetta.
The answer may have come to her so quickly because she saw herself as Kyousuke's big sister.
"Well, wouldn't that be his mother and *little sister*? If he had been alone there, he wouldn't have had a reason to bear with it all."
"Yes, that is correct. It might seem cliché, but that was what supported his heart. He wanted to save his mother and *little sister* who were being beaten in his place as if to teach him a lesson. He wanted to gain the strength to outdo Doctor S and free his family. That was the only thing on his mind as he so valiantly completed all the tasks presented to him. However."
The White Queen paused there.
She had a subdued look on her face because not even she knew what expression was appropriate here.
"Like I said, that small house was Doctor S's lab. Shigara Masami, you intuitively sensed it as soon as you saw it for yourself. Everything in that house served a purpose. Even the positions of the pencils and erasers."
<What about it?>
"Another question: what role did the mother and *little sister* play? And who had placed them in that role?"
That question left the other two's minds blank.
The answer to that question was certainly a possibility, but even considering something so horrific felt taboo or profane.
"To repeat: that small house was Doctor S's lab and everything there served a purpose. It was all set up to complete the methodology for surpassing the limits of the Blood-Sign Summoning Ceremony to both summon and control me, the White Queen. My brother was being made stronger for that purpose. He was being made into a precision-guided missile that would never give up once he set his sights on something."
<Wait, you can't be serious. That can't possibly be true, can it!?>
In other words…
In other words…

In other words…
“His mother and *little sister* were in on it. Those family members were no more than staff members or assistants prepared by Doctor S. It was all meant to construct a sob story to inspire my brother to fight when he otherwise would have refused.”

Part 8

“Unforgivable.”
Someone’s shoulders were trembling.
It was Meinokawa Aoi who looked so uncannily like the White Queen.
And this was not due to the alcohol.

“Curse that Doctor S!! Has he no respect for people’s hearts!? Argh, you should have told me sooner! I should have killed that bastard before you handed him over to Government!!”
She started making chronologically impossible complaints. Meinokawa Aoi had been attacked and torn to pieces by the White Queen at the start of that mess, so she had been entirely left out of the Houbi Village incident where Doctor S and Olivia had been plotting behind the scenes.
But she was so angry that slipped her mind.
Even though Kyousuke felt abandoned by his own memories since he could not remember their names or what they looked like.
“Aoi.”
“What!?”
“Why are you crying?”
When she heard that, the silver-haired shrine maiden pulled the sheet up over her head.
“How should I know?” she sulked from below the sheet.
But it was not over yet.
There was still more to this hopeless story.
The words “help me” had yet to appear.

Sinceria Report 04

“What are you doing, mom?”
“Hee hee hee. I was thinking a capable mother should review the day’s results.”
Running water could be heard through the door because Rachel, the glasses knight, was taking a shower.
Sinceria held an ordinary tablet in a business hotel room. Cheap but high performance was how the ruler of Kingdom F did things. Olivia, who still wore her school swimsuit with decorative cloth and pareo, peeked at the screen and saw the girls they had spoken to before arriving in this rural city.
Sekurtiti was not the only one.
“Shigara Masami.” Sinceria slowly pronounced the name with long ears twitching while sitting on the bed. “The White Queen overshadows her, but she has made herself enough of a legend on her own. And there is very little information on her. So it is fortunate we managed to contact *her* early on. Let’s review the information for Kyousuke’s sake too.”
Yes.
The screen displayed a woman with a long black ponytail and a tight skirt suit. She looked like Shigara Masami, but she was not. Her name was Himekawa Mika. That vessel had so looked up to Shigara Masami that she had remade herself to look just like her. The best way to identify her may have been the intentionally torn sides of her tight skirt.
She had apparently fought alongside Kyousuke during the incident related to Pandemonium and the Deltaston family, but according to her…
“There is not much I know. I had never even heard of the Queen’s Miniature Garden, much less the fact that she was Freedom Award 3000.”
She had been very modest at first, but she had gradually dug deeper into the issue as time passed.
There was a simple reason for that: the mug of beer in her hand in the middle of the day.
“I wonder if the real one likes alcohol too. Like you do, mom.”
“Maybe so, but your mother does not get so woozy even after drinking several beers. And just like Meinokawa Aoi copies the White Queen’s appearance to help get into her mindset, I assume Himekawa Mika’s behavior is copied after Shigara Masami to an extent.”

“But as a researcher,” continued Himekawa after finishing off her beer like some kind of ritual. “She tended to be very precise and something of a perfectionist. So she was better at using the brakes than the gas pedal. If she decided it would be dangerous to go any further, she could cut off all desire from there on. She would rationally step back and reassess the big picture. …If she used that side of her in the field of combat, her fighting style was probably something like a spider or antlion. Instead of making any big moves herself, she would persistently poke at her opponent and wait for them to adapt to her pace. She was always true to the fundamentals and made no mistakes herself, so I imagine she would use even a single mistake from her enemy to destroy them with more and more shots fired with perfect accuracy.”

“Ugh,” groaned Olivia.

Sinceria and Olivia viewed the world of the Summoning Ceremony through the lens of a vessel, but they still had their thoughts about Himekawa Mika’s analysis. They had no desire to take on someone who gradually wore down their opponent’s nerves and waited for them to make a mistake.

It would be like playing tennis against a thick wall.

You could hit the ball back a thousand or even ten thousand times, but if your racket missed the ball just once, you lost. It would be like the battle against your enemy had suddenly transformed into a battle against yourself. How long would each and every second feel to a summoner fighting Shigara Masami?

“That sounds like an even more perfected form of Onii-chan.”

“Yes.”

Shiroyama Kyousuke was a highly variable summoner who would stick to the fundamentals to an extent, but he had a tendency to rely on tricky stunts when it really mattered. A look at their battle records showed that Biondetta was less reliant on gambles because she stuck to underhanded methods from beginning to end.

“I imagine it was Shigara Masami *as a researcher* who taught them the basics. What we don’t know is how much of an influence she had on Biondetta and the other survivors of the Miniature Garden. But there must have been some influence.”

Rachel and the other Kingdom F knights were trained as summoners using a different method from the Miniature Garden, but what would happen if they got into a fight with Shigara Masami? Sinceria could not say it out loud because it would infuriate Rachel, but based on the results during Kingdom F’s civil war, she doubted Knight Representative Rachel could defeat Miniature-Garden-trained Kyousuke. And it was best to assume Shigara Masami was on a level even higher than Kyousuke.

In that case…

“We’re moving on to someone else?” asked Olivia.

“This is Ellie Slide. She is well known as an incense expert.”

The tablet displayed a girl about as tall as Olivia. Her skin was tanned a healthy brown with bright swimsuit tan lines. Her blonde hair was not worn up and was left unkempt. And yet she also had an intellectual face that included glasses.
“Award 3000?” she sounded exasperated from the start. “If someone like that really does exist, you would have to be an idiot to challenge them in the Summoning Ceremony. It would be a waste of time.”
The way she rejected straightforward work was similar to Kyousuke but also somehow different.
He was known to say the battle began before the preparations for the Summoning Ceremony were complete and he would often settle things with a surprise attack before any Materials had been summoned. But that also meant he was accepting his opponent’s skill and was afraid of being worn down by a serious battle with them.
Kyousuke might look like he reigned supreme at the very top, but he never underestimated his enemy.
It was because he recognized their skill that he did not hold back.
“But even if someone has earned Awards in the quadruple digits, they are still bound to the Blood-Sign System. The stronger they become, the harder it is to escape the field they have mastered. That means there is nothing to guarantee their strength without the foundation of those basic rules. A boxer who is undefeated in the ring will not necessarily be able to hold their own in a street fight, and vice-versa. This has nothing to do with who is better. It is a simple concept: if you cannot defeat the individual, then shake up their world instead.”
“I don’t like her,” said Olivia.
“My, my, Via. You shouldn’t be so quick to judge.”
“It’s simple.” On the screen, Ellie Slide spoke with scorn in her voice. “You could tamper with their Incense Grenades so they won’t detonate, or you could steal their Blood-Sign. Either way, you just have to prevent them from starting a battle using the Blood-Sign Summoning Ceremony. I am an incense expert, so I do not make a living with direct fistfights. I am a coward who always looks for a way around such things.”

Facts

- The house Doctor S used as a lab was preserved as if time had stopped. Presumably, this was the result of the heavy burden placed on it by the White Queen's power.
- Shiroyama Kyousuke's predictions of the White Queen's actions leave something to be desired in the accuracy department, so the two of them have just missed each other a few times. But Shigara Masami and Biondetta's familiarity with his habits has played a role in this.
- Sinceria and Olivia seemed to recognize the *little sister* they saw in the passport photo.
- Shiroyama Kyousuke's *little sister* was not the White Queen.
- Everything in that small house served a purpose. Shiroyama Kyousuke's mother and *little sister* were no more than staff members or assistants hired by Doctor S. Doctor S used them to give Kyousuke someone to protect in order to keep him working when he would have broken on his own.
- And you must not forget. Feeling anger over the past is all well and good, but Shigara Masami and Biondetta have trampled on Kyousuke's trust just like his former family did.

Stage 04: The Truth About “Brother”

“White Queen.”
“Don’t you dare interfere.”
(Stage 04 Open 08/23 00:01)
The Truth About “Brother”

Part 1

The old-fashioned analog lock broke as he kicked down the door with a loud bang.
“Tch!!”
Someone had been here.
They had left signs of their presence in the room adjacent to the one Kyousuke was staying in. There were wrinkles in the sheets, water droplets in the bath, and a few mugs that appeared to have been quickly washed in the sink.
It was just past midnight on August 23.
The room was deserted. This was the 9th floor, but the curtain blew in a lukewarm breeze as if to provide an explanation. It would have been more convincing to hear they had vanished in a puff of smoke.
The White Queen had been here.
Until very recently.
Aoi soon caught up to him, but even outside of their room, she still wore the towel-material bathrobe which was too big for her. She did seem to have left her One Cup Yokozuna behind. Without her usual white sarashi, her breasts were jiggling a distracting amount.
“What is it, boy? Did you hit the jackpot?”
“That’s a prize I’d rather not win.”
She had gotten away.
And the Colorless Little Girl was responding to the cocoon’s growth.
The risk from both sides grew as time passed.
Kyousuke spat out the words, but he was also coldly analyzing the situation. He realized something odd when observing the position of the beds and chairs, the number of used mugs, and the amount of soap and shampoo that had been used.
“It’s more than just the two?”
“Hm?”
He had assumed it was just the White Queen and Shigara Masami working together, but this hotel room suggested there was a third person with them. Assuming the White Queen had not left intentionally misleading evidence, she had some other helper.
Kyousuke wandered around the room. No, he was pursuing each piece of evidence to figure out what the people here had done. Just like a profiler viewed a crime scene in a different way from a forensics team.

“…”
Who could it be?
He started to look puzzled as he pursued the unseen person’s actions.
And he opened his mouth just like the needle following the groove of a record.
“Don’t be dumb, you complete fuckhead!!”
“Eek!? Wh-what was that for? What did I even do?”
“?”
Meinokawa Aoi tearfully covered the top of her head with her hands when he suddenly swore at her, but Kyousuke was only tilting his head.
(Wait. An extreme sweet tooth and chugging the contents of a pill bottle???)
As he followed the signs, he found something in the gap between the TV stand and the floor.
It was a white pill that appeared to be an antibiotic. He also found a pellet of pet food. Probably for a reptile, specifically a snake.
That clinched it.
“*You* too, Biondetta!!!???”

“Whew, we really screwed that one up.”
Still in her miniskirt waitress uniform, Biondetta stuck out her tongue while using the downspout to escape to the asphalt road.
The only things in that room had been their tools for a Blood-Sign battle and the bare minimum needed to spend a night in the hotel. Attacking someone in their sleep was standard practice, so their other clothing and items not needed to survive were in a coin locker at the train station.
But even then…
“This is honestly pretty bad. I was so focused on getting out of there, I left tons of evidence I was there. Caesar Kyousuke-chan is probably really pissed at me right about now!”
The White Queen and Shigara Masami were supernatural beings, so Biondetta carried the greatest risk of leaving evidence behind in *the real world*. The others had been aware of that when they let her join them, so they were not going to complain.
<But I wonder how he knew we were there. Did he hear us through the wall? Or did he just sense our presence???>
“He did it because he is my brother.”
It was not clear if there was any deeper meaning in the White Queen’s explanation.
She and Kyousuke were two sides of the same coin. Just as she sought love from him, he pursued her based on his combat instincts.
And that was not the main point here.
With her bare legs mostly visible below her short casual dress, the White Queen glanced back just once.
“Do you think he will pursue us right away?”

Her group wanted to avoid a fight with Shiroyama Kyousuke. After all, they could not stop the expanding cocoon or the responding Colorless Little Girl unless she accepted that Shigara Masami stopping her had been the best option for her and Kyousuke. Any major cracks in that now would bring them back to square one.
But Shigara Masami shook her head in her suit and lab coat.
<I doubt it. Because he has no surefire way of attacking us.>
“What? But he has the Colorless Little Girl he built specifically to use against me.”
<Queen, that might work against you, but what about me? I am technically Freedom Award 3000, which means I have more than 3 times the Awards he does. He is a combat expert in his own way, so do you think he would really be naïve enough to think he could defeat us both at once by rushing in without a plan? Especially when he has a contract with a vessel girl.>
“…”
That reminded the White Queen of something as the short hem of her thin casual dress fluttered in the wind. To make a long story short, Shiroyama Kyousuke had never defeated Government Award 1000, Elvast Toydream. Being defeated along with his vessel must have been a bitter memory for him.
And this time it was Freedom Award 3000.
This woman was a warrior among warriors who had traversed all three major powers and taken 1000 Awards from each.
No matter how the battle would actually go, Kyousuke would never take an optimistic view before it began.
<Let’s assume Kyousuke-kun has been working his brain around the clock to come up with a method of defeating us one-against-two since he learned I had taken your side. It would have to be a personal attack that pinpoint targeted some kind of critical weakness. But he would have only just learned that Biondetta-chan is with us, right? All of his assumptions have fallen apart. His assault on our room might look courageous, but he is the one who will be agonizing over all his plans going awry.>
The scary part about Biondetta was how she could pull off victories above her Award level by using underhanded tricks. He might be able to handle her one-on-one since he could keep his eyes on her at all times, but in a one-on-three fray, he would have a much harder time predicting what would happen.
They just had to look at it with some of the positions reverse.
Even if she was Freedom Award 3000, Shigara Masami would want to avoid rushing in to fight both Biondetta and the White Queen without a plan. That could easily end up more than just a normal Blood-Sign battle. Who knows what that waitress demon could *draw out of* the Queen.
Summoners would predict each other’s actions at a very high level, but that brought its own kind of doubts and anxieties. Shiroyama Kyousuke was not dumb enough to thoughtlessly rush in. Shigara Masami could guarantee

that more than anyone. During the Secret War at the end of the Queen's Miniature Garden, he had learned all too well what that kind of recklessness would bring.
The situation was in their favor.
As if the entire world were blessing the White Queen.
But the Queen herself looked like she would start gnawing on her thumbnail if she let her guard down.
"This must be very painful for him. Seeing the betrayal of a family member must be digging into his old scars."
<Yes, that may be true.>
Her journey to learn what it means to be human was not over yet.
Shigara Masami agreed with her while walking along the night road.
But she had more to say while fiddling with the whistle around her neck.
<The more obstacles standing in the way of your love, the more exciting it is, Queen.>

Part 2

The White Queen and Shigara Masami had been joined by Biondetta. Shiroyama Kyousuke knew he could not defeat them without preparing first. Still, he did not currently have the patience to just sit and wait. To stop the Colorless Little Girl's rampage, they had to stop the expansion of the cocoon. To stop the cocoon, they just had to kill the Queen. The Queen was right there. Perhaps he should have breathed a sigh of relief that he had escaped this time. This was primetime for an assassin. He just had to get one attack in even if it was by surprise.

"Ohhhhhhhh, you stupid dumb fool! Cool your head! Are you trying to get yourself killed!? If all you can do is stagger onto the battlefield without a realistic chance at victory, then you need work behind the scenes for now! Why don't you get that!?"

His teacher's prediction had been wrong. Meinokawa Aoi had grabbed at him from behind and he was dragging her down the business hotel hallway, but then he realized her voice was growing more distant. She was leaning her full weight on him, but her head and legs had been left behind after they popped off. The bathrobe was a complete mess now.

That was when they ran across another coincidence.

"This calls for a motherly punch to calm Kyousuke down!!"

"Wait, mom didn't use her motherly tolerance this time!?"

Sinceria and Olivia were there.

And the royal mother played rock rather than paper.

As evidenced by Sinceria Highland's long ears, the very structure of her body had taken a step outside the framework of humanity because she had held contracts with more summoners than any other vessel.

With the headless shrine maiden still clinging to his back, Kyousuke was knocked all the way to the hallway wall.

The kind and gentle woman smiled with one palm to her cheek.

"O-oh, dear. If you sell my hit that hard, it makes it look like I was showing off some kind of inhuman strength. With Hong Kong films, they do say the villain's ability to throw themselves around is more important than the lead's ability to punch or kick. Oh, Kyousuke, you're just so good at everything☆"

"My queen. Smiling as you strike too quickly for a professional fighter like me to react places your muscles solidly above those of a mountain gorill-…"

"Rachel, one word more and it's the Judas cradle for you."

The glasses knight decided to hold her tongue because she could sense how serious her queen was behind that smile. Sinceria was known as a goddess with the three faces of a mother, a woman, and a ruler, but Rachel was left trembling at the hint of a 0th personality hidden behind those three. Meanwhile, young Olivia only looked puzzled since she did not know what that high-level term meant.
“What are all of you doing here?”
“Kyousuke, you always had an aura of seeing right through people, so this must be worse than I thought if you’re asking such vague questions. You probably still need time to recover. Hee hee hee. So if you go climb into the hospital bed like a good boy, I will lie down next to you and sing you a lullaby.”
“Was mom always the type to beat them into submission before hugging them!? I-I can’t let my guard down around her. Was she the final boss standing in my way this whole time?”
Blonde braided Olivia trembled in fear, but they ignored her for now.
“So you all were pursuing the White Queen too?”
“Have the gears finally started to turn, Kyousuke? Given the location of the cocoon, the future of Kingdom F hinges on this issue. No, given the danger if the Colorless Little Girl loses control, the future of the entire world is at risk. How could we possibly just sit idly by?”
Kyousuke sighed while shoving the most important part onto Aoi’s neck and sticking his hands up her bathrobe to attach her legs.
His response was blunt.
“You’ll die.”
“I could say the same to you.” Sinceria continued to smile. “You could not even dodge my fist, so how do you expect to do anything against the White Queen? Summoning Ceremony battles begin before the first Material is summoned. It takes five seconds for a thrown Incense Grenade to detonate and do you really think she is going to wait for the Artificial Sacred Ground?”
“…”
“Oh, dear. Oh, dear, dear, dear. This is not good at all, Kyousuke. Did you think you alone would receive special treatment from the White Queen? Don’t you have this entirely backwards? Kyousuke, no matter how you hope for this to end, you need to first free yourself from the yoke of the White Queen. You are not even standing on the starting line yet. How do you like devouring the food your father made you while insisting you’re entirely independent, Mr. Rebellious Phase?”
“Yes, yes. I get it.”
The Blood-Sign System was created by Doctor S, Kyousuke’s father.
The White Queen had used her position as the strongest to stay by his side all this time.
So there was only one way to look at it.

“In the end, it was Shigara Masami and not me who created a situation the White Queen did not expect. Everything I’ve done has been in the palm of her hand and I haven’t taken a step outside that. Freedom Award 903? Hah! It’s not imaginary, it’s not an irrational root, and it’s even a damn integer! It’s all perfectly in line with the Third Style created by Doctor S and preserved by the White Queen. To hell with it all!!”
“Onii-chan…”
“The whole world is a cage.” Kyousuke roared with teeth bared like a beast. “If I want to break free of this naïve rebellious phase, I need to reject everything Doctor S created, beat down the White Queen, and take it farther than anyone ever expected. That’s what you’re saying, right? Well, I should be able to do it. Shigara Masami is a Divine-class, but she’s overwhelmed the White Queen who exists beyond the Unexplored-class!! I know the rules can be broken, so surely I can-…”
“You stupid child. This isn’t even a rebellious phase. You’re still sucking on your pacifier.”
This time it was Meinokawa Aoi’s fist that hit him on the top of the head. When he stopped talking, the silver-haired shrine maiden (currently wearing only a bathrobe) winked at him.
“What, you couldn’t predict or dodge that one? Boy, you should really get some maintenance done.”
“~ ~ ~”
“And you two of noble blood, I know your kingdom is threatened by the cocoon and the Colorless Little Girl, but I must ask that you stop hoping to accomplish anything by stirring up this boy’s fighting spirit and directing him toward the Queen. I do not know what connection you have with him, *but I am his vessel now, so back off.* Do you really expect me to just sit here while you take advantage of his psychological exhaustion to drive him toward a flawed attack plan?”
Imaginary sparks flew.
And after some silence, fluffy blonde Sinceria spoke up.
“Do you really think you could fight me, woman against woman? Rachel took things much too far earlier, but you do know my skeletal structure itself is no longer quite human, don’t you?”
“Mwa ha ha. So this fight would be as a woman instead of a ruler or mother? How romantic of you.”
Aoi stepped forward and crossed her arms to pointlessly push up her large breasts (which were loose without her sarashi).
She was protecting Kyousuke so he was not *directed down the path of justice* while he was not thinking straight.
“Also, I am the world’s oldest Joruri Method, so I am not much different from you. I was never human in the first place, so don’t hold back. Bring it on, you mountain gorilla disguised as-…”
The ruler’s fist sent Meinokawa Aoi’s head flying before she could finish speaking.

Sinceria’s eyes widened, glasses knight Rachel covered her eyes with a hand, and Olivia screamed at the horrific scene. The headless corpse stood there with arms still crossed, forgetting to fall. But the head rolled down the hallway, bumped into the bottom of the icemaker, and started shouting something.
“Run away, boy!! Forget about me!! She really does have monstrous strength and isn’t afraid to use it!! Kyah, get out of here if you want to escape a night of fear with that carnivorous love monster who doesn’t know how to act her age!! Protect your chastity, boyyyyyyyyyy!!”
“Hold it right there!! I saw how easily your head came off earlier. I bet you’ve made it so it would come off if a kindergartner hit you. S-so stop treating me like I’m some kind of creepy monster. R-right!?”
“I can see you’re panicking over being insulted as a woman in front of the boy, but it’s too late now. Mwa ha ha. As an image of the Queen, I will grant you an Award: ‘Gorilla who rips off the heads of any female vessels she sees near the (much younger) boy she is preying on.’ Mwa ha ha ha ha!!”
“Noooooo

“Goddammit.”

Part 3

The next morning.
“Heyyyy, boy!”
On the way to that small house, someone called out to Kyousuke from behind.
He clicked his tongue.
“There’s no need to be that obvious about disliking me. And don’t just leave me behind at the hotel. That hurts, you know? But anyway, a summoner and his vessel are linked, so I really don’t see the point. I would be dragged to you once you threw an Incense Grenade.”
“Why are you here? I don’t need a vessel who puts the world in danger by wasting valuable time and running away from fighting the White Queen.”
“Hold on now. Why are you assuming you need to fight the White Queen to end this? I know the cocoon and Colorless Little Girl are a lot of trouble, but aren’t you letting those Kingdom F people influence you too much???”
“What are you-…?”
“Smoooooch.”
“Wah!!” yelled Kyousuke as he jumped back.
That was a real close shave. And in her shrine maiden outfit and sarashi, Aoi opened just the one eye while still puckered up for a kiss.
“I have one question for you, boy. You seem to treat me very differently from the White Queen, but why is that?”
“That’s a stupid question. You’re completely different people, just like Renge and Higan are.”
“That’s nice and all, but let’s double check your definitions. I was created to look identical to the White Queen in every way. I’m like a statue of Buddha or the Virgin Mary in that way. In ooooother words, we are identical when it comes to appearance.”
Below the midsummer sun, the silver-shrine maiden took a very un-shrine-maiden-like pose by placing her hands behind her head and twisting her hips. She checked her bodylines in the round mirror used to see around a dangerous turn in the road.
“You go on and on about how much you despise the White Queen and how much she makes you want to vomit, but I didn’t notice any negative emotions when you saw me in my swimsuit or this shrine maiden outfit. And when you jumped back from that attempted kiss, *it was not out of disgust, was it?*”

“…”
“Mwa ha ha ha ha!! There, there. No need to blush, boy. Teenage boys are so cute.”
Meinokawa Aoi seemed to have seized the initiative enough to make her own move. There was definite confidence in her mischievous smile. She had some nerve acting like this after nearly dropping her bento when he hugged her on the train.
However.
Something was different now.
Perhaps this was the Joruri Method ability to use the appearance to play the role.
It was probably impossible for Shiroyama Kyousuke to identify with the White Queen. The very thought of it made him feel like there were tons of little bugs crawling around under his skin.
“So your issue is not with her appearance. So where does your disgust come from? Is it how the White Queen talks, her personality, or some other internal issue?”
It was like an invisible switch had been thrown.
The cicada cries sounded more distant.
“If so, you should start getting goose bumps when I talk like this, brother. Yet I do not see it.”
“This is silly.”
She took on a sweet voice and a smiling personality that stomped right on into someone’s greatest depths.
But Kyousuke shook his head and spat out a rejection.
“Copy her mannerisms all you like, but you haven’t done anything wrong. A harmless person can’t create a connection to the Queen just by forcibly pretending to be evil.”
“Oh, is that so, brother? You must be very particular about my behavior and appearance. Hee hee. I didn’t know you loved me quite that much. You’re going to make me blush☆”
“Aoi.”
“So it isn’t her appearance or personality. What does that leave? Something she did in the past?”
The heavy silence that followed made it feel like even the shimmering of heat above the asphalt had frozen.
“After everything.”
It was quiet.
But Shiroyama Kyousuke bared another part of his heart as if squeezing out the words.
“After everything she did, how else am I supposed to feel about her?”
“So you could have loved her if not for that?”
“Don’t give me that bull-…”
“But it’s true, isn’t it?”
There was no smile in Meinokawa Aoi’s eyes.

They were like mechanical lenses observing the expression and eye movements of a suspect in custody.
“The issue is not with her appearance or personality. The events of the past are the only possibility I can come up with. Boy, you said it yourself, didn’t you? He need not reject me because, unlike the White Queen, I am harmless. Then here’s a hypothetical for you: What if the White Queen had never killed anyone and you felt she was harmless? How would you behave around her then?”
“That’s a meaningless question.”
“Then why go to the trouble of refusing to answer? It isn’t like a yes or a no answer will change anything about reality.”
“So what?” he spat out in desperation. Was he harming the Queen or himself at this point? “So what!? Yes, it’s true. There was a time when I trusted the White Queen. I even made a promise with her in the Queen’s Miniature Garden! I had her promise not to kill anyone!! And you know what happened then? Look at the world around you! It’s still falling apart!!”
Claude Magentarain had not died.
So what?
Shigara Masami did not want revenge.
So what?
How could they look at those exceptions to the norm and claim they spoke for all the other victims of the Secret War? What about Shiroyama Kyoumi? What about the nameless guards? What about the old leaders of Government and Illegal? It was obvious, it should have been so stupidly obvious, but most of them had not survived. Seeing a miracle or two was not enough to erase the resentment from all the others.
“That’s nonsense. It doesn’t add up. I can’t disrespect all those victims by looking at it like that. Half the world’s tragedies are my fault and the other half are her fault!!!!!!”
“Mwa ha ha.”
But even after being pummeled by a deluge of words, Meinokawa Aoi was laughing.
And on the side of a deserted road…
“I’m glad I heard that.”
“?”
“Boy, you don’t get to take back what you said. Not unless you go crying to the White Queen who can bend the timeline.”
“What…what are you trying to say, Meinokawa Aoi!?”
“Let’s get to the heart of the matter already. Boy, the one and only thing you can’t forgive the White Queen for is some incident from the past, right? The Queen *was not* harmless, so you can’t forgive her. You get goose bumps, feel nauseated and dizzy, get a headache, and feel other symptoms of a cold, but it all goes back to the same thing.”
“You can’t change the past.”

“Of course not. I’m sure the Queen can mess with the timeline, but because she is a singularity like that, she cannot change the things she herself has caused. Isn’t that how it works?”
If the White Queen directly killed someone, then that was the end. There was no way of bringing them back, even if you introduced time travel or parallel worlds.
And yet.
“But, boy, you are making one fundamental mistake.”
“?”
“There is nothing wrong with not being harmless. What I mean is, you need not remain bound by the past.”
At first, he honestly did not know what she was talking about.
His mind would not have been this blank if he were suffering from heatstroke.
When Meinokawa Aoi smiled from this close up, she looked like a mysterious being with no understandable language or thoughts.
“For example, what if we were to discuss the future?”
“The future?”
“Or you could think of it as possibilities. What if? What if the White Queen repented for everything she had done, swore she would never do it again, and gave up all of her power? Couldn’t you call her harmless then?”
“That’s ridiculous.”
“Do not forget what you yourself said, boy. You admitted your hatred came from there instead of her appearance or personality.”
“This is utterly ridiculous!! So if she says ‘my bad’ and turns over a new leaf, we’re just supposed to pretend none of it ever happened? Do you have any idea how many people she’s killed!?”
“What, so the death penalty is the only option left?”
“Yes!!”
“But, boy.”
She smiled like an immature old woman who insisted on outdoing a young child in a battle of wits.
“If the White Queen said she agreed and laid her head on the chopping block for you, could you really still call her evil?”
The cold sweat soaking Kyousuke was enough to completely forget the midsummer sun.
“Do you really think…?”
“Hm?”
“Do you really think that’s going to stop me? Do you really think some sweet sob story can get me to hug the Queen instead of killing her!?”
“This is nothing so shallow.” Meinokawa Aoi looked utterly exasperated.
“Let’s say the White Queen really does accept all blame and really truly does let herself be executed. *What happens then*? And I am talking about a true annihilation without any resurrections, rebirths, or other loopholes.

Boy, once the Queen has proven with her life that she is harmless, would you still have the guts to spit on her name?”
“…”
“It isn’t like history will suddenly end with her death. People’s bonds continue even after one of them dies. You should know that given *how many of the dead you drag around with you*. So it is possible you would be freed from your hatred. And if that happens, how could you accept the fact that you killed the Queen once she proved she was harmless? Could you really directly accept the fact that you had killed someone who did not need to be killed? I mean, I seem to recall a certain insolent boy saying he could never forgive the Queen because she killed someone who did not need to be killed. Wouldn’t you be the same for killing the harmless Queen? And where could you go once you found yourself unable to accept yourself? *Wandering the world after breaking down from your excessive power sounds a lot like someone else we know*.”
“……
……”
Aoi gave a snort of laughter on the deserted road.
“You coward. What you are doing is no different from the witch trials that shoved a suspect into the water and declared them innocent if they drowned. What happened to trying to stop the cocoon and Colorless Little Girl? I am not obligated to take one side or the other, but this will not please the Queen either. Even she will flail around in search of oxygen when you force her underwater. It is just that her flailing arms and legs carry unimaginable power.”
“These questions are meaningless.”
“Probably. But I have pricked you with the thorn, hero. Not a nail or stake that will cause a fatal wound. The pain from this tiny thorn will stick with you for a long while. The what-ifs will stick with you. You will wonder if there was some path that would have let the White Queen live happily alongside everyone else just like any other girl. …Knowing and not knowing are very different things. So whatever result you aim for, keep this in mind: Boy, now you know. You can no longer claim you do not know what it means to remain dedicated to your goal of killing the Queen to the very end.”
Kyousuke said nothing.
He simply stood there, so Meinokawa Aoi spread her arms and pointed in a certain direction.
She pointed toward a small house.
“Now, let’s get going, cowardly hero. I will not support either side. I will simply take a step back and observe how you choose to save the world.”

Part 4

The entire shopping center was named Multiple.
This rundown rural city was not a part of Toy Dream's revived city program, so the one lively place near the train station was the shopping center. It was crammed full of small stores primarily offering food, clothing, or electronics, but the fresh foods were definitely the foundation of it all. That was why the front gate was already open at 9 AM and cheerful music was playing on a loop while the names of supermarket chains were visible here and there.
The hustle and bustle of people was joined by the chorus of cicada cries.
"Neat, they have more than 200 stores in a space about the size of a domed stadium."
Biondetta bent over in her miniskirt to look at the map on the wall.
But she was not exactly impressed.
"They have so much empty land from failed redevelopment projects, so they could have easily built 10 or 20 of these domes. I wonder why they decided to cram all 200 in here."
How could you describe the center as a whole? It was something like a colosseum built with modern construction. The main building was a giant circle, the roof was supported by thick columns, there were 8 entrances people could freely enter or leave through, and there was a large fountain plaza in the center for use as an event space.
The ponytail researcher named Shigara Masami glanced over at the White Queen walking next to her in a white casual dress.
<Are you sure you don't want to revisit that house, Queen?>
"Yes."
The White Queen walked gracefully through the crowd without disturbing the flow of people as she made her way from the exterior parking lot, through one of the gates, and toward the fountain plaza. Local children were gathered around a kiddie pool with water balloons floating in it. It was likely a game where you fished them out by their strings. The White Queen gave a curious look at a sign announcing the Colorful Sentai Hero Show would start at 11.
"I am more or less finished with it. You could say I had everything I needed to reconstruct the lost data when I saw that house. So let us wait here until my brother catches up."
"So no matter what happens, the order doesn't change, huh? The Queen in first and Kyousuke-chan playing catch up."

Biondetta giggled like an alluring demon, but the White Queen winked and held a finger to her lips.
“You must not mention that to him. My brother has always gotten so worked up over that.”
<Biondetta-chan is doing it on purpose. She’s rotten to the core.>
“Nee shee shee.”
<Yes, you have always been the mischievous type that teases the boy she likes to get a reaction out of him.>
“Wait, what!?”
The waitress demon grew flustered on the way up the escalator to the second floor’s midair walkway. And Shigara Masami had something else to say.
<Queen, your dress.>
“Oh, whoops.”
…In the end, this may have been where it all went wrong.
The White Queen was of course the White Queen.
She was the strongest through and through and that had never wavered.
This was an age of upheaval, but if you looked back, Shiroyama Kyousuke was entirely unchanged. He had never insisted on anything other than defeating the White Queen. It was the world that changed. Shigara Masami had scored a critical hit on the White Queen and that mental blow had affected the fight for the top between the White Queen and the Colorless Little Girl.
Then why was Shiroyama Kyousuke so stubborn?
Given how selflessly he had saved those many Alices, it seemed strange for him to be so dead set on violence.
In other words…
<Kyousuke-chan is too reliant on you.>
Shigara Masami cut right to the heart of the matter.
The White Queen looked through the show windows of the small shops lining the curved midair walkway until the scrunchie woman lightly slapped her defenseless butt.
<He relies on you being the strongest who can’t be defeated no matter what. That’s how he knows *you can handle anything he throws at you*. At his core, he has a challenger’s mentality. I have no idea if he is even aware of it, though.>
“A challenger?”
<Yes. He comes running once the incident has already occurred. It can be hard to tell since he is one of the strongest with his more than 900 Awards, but he is not the titleholder waiting for the challengers to come to him.>
Yes, he was the challenger, so he did not know how to hold back.
He was the attacker, so he always went in with everything he had.
Shiroyama Kyousuke could not have gone as far as he had with any other opponent.

Not even with Biondetta, Shigara Masami, the Three of the Unexplored-class, or the Colorless Little Girl.
It was only because the White Queen was the White Queen.
She was as unreasonable as could be, but that also meant she sat in a special position that no one else could fill.
She was the only one that boy saw as sitting in that throne.
The Queen sighed while viewing her reflection in the window.
“This is very complicated.”
“Oh, is that why it was such a shock for him when you joined the fight, Shigara Masami? It might have felt like you were saying the Queen should be protected, pointing out that she has her weaknesses too, and calling him scum for attacking a girl instead of hearing what she had to say.”
<It might have felt like waiting for a death match to begin, but then having the monitors filled with photos from the champion’s private album, stirring up sympathy for your opponent. Now people will call you a monster if you don’t go easy on them, but you never wanted to see them smiling with their family and holding their baby.>
But it was not right to criticize Kyousuke either
Just think back on the fierce incidents he had survived so far. Could any of them have been solved with compromise or kindness? Freedom Award 903, Alice (with) Rabbit, had only just barely pulled through after pouring his all into it. After constantly looking up from the mud to see the White Queen laughing, who could blame him for wanting to strike back even more harshly?
What if he had reduced the tension just a little?
What if he had compromised and given up on revenge?
If more people had died, the White Queen had committed more misdeeds, and the girls close to him had been torn apart, he never, ever could have forgiven her.
<It’s like a game of chicken.>
Shiroyama Kyousuke would show no mercy.
But it was also true he could not have stopped the White Queen any other way.
Shigara Masami, who wore a lab coat over her suit, continued while observing a kit for growing algae in a wall-hanging container much like a picture frame.
<Last time, I was trying to point out that you can overwhelm the White Queen without fighting, but does Kyousuke-kun really have the courage to let go now that he has loaded his car with everything he cares for and floored the gas pedal?>
“We kind of have to hope he does, don’t we?” Biondetta sounded exasperated, but the devil’s tail extending from her miniskirt was swishing side to side a bit. “I mean, Kyousuke-chan has grown as much as he has through his obsession with the White Queen, but that won’t necessarily last forever. The White Queen has always been the White Queen. In RPG terms,

she’s the final boss who never gets any stronger. But he is different. …To be blunt, you have a ridiculous 3000 Awards, but can you even keep up with what he’s doing? I’ve seriously been considering throwing in the towel on that ever since he started screwing with the world’s fundamental laws with the Colorless Little Girl. Like, why does that nonsense code even run, right?”

<…>

The cicada cries were the only other sound.

“A Fourth Style to combat the Third Style? He’s not even fighting on a level that uses the Blood-Sign to hit balls around. The very laws of the world are collapsing. The only thing keeping him remotely stable is the impossible task of ‘defeating the White Queen’ still standing in his way. But what if *he does actually break through that*? What if he actually achieves what he was convinced could never happen and loses his bearings in life? How far will he go along with the Colorless Little Girl…or with something even nastier he creates? I can’t even imagine the answer.”

For the world at large, the White Queen was a source of great chaos. Her threat could not even be perceived as a threat because the weak-minded tended more toward worship than fear.

But what about Shiroyama Kyousuke, the one and only person who had sharpened his fangs in order to oppose her?

Depending on his decisions, couldn’t he become something even more fearsome than the White Queen?

<How did this ever get so complicated?>

The researcher knew the answer.

She knew it, but she still had to ask the question.

And the higher being naturally gave the obvious answer.

“Because this is my brother and me we are talking about.”

Part 5

Once they arrived, they found not much had changed.
Kyousuke looked at the small house.
“It’s faded somewhat compared to yesterday?”
“Are you telling me that? If you have a bad habit of talking to yourself, you should work to fix it.”
In what may have been a sign of caution, Aoi tightened the sarashi she used as a mental restraint and she pouted her lips.
Perhaps because it was his own house, Shiroyama Kyousuke showed no restraint toward the lost time here. Specifically, he walked right on in without removing his shoes.
How much had time been distorted with that first step?
In the worst case, they would find the human race destroyed when they left the house once more.
They heard small feet in the living room. The sound had enough weight to it that it was easy to forget it was no more than an illusion or hallucination.
The White Queen was the one who had stopped time in this localized area.
Which meant…
(The Queen isn’t here?)
Kyousuke was already lost in thought, ignoring Meinokawa Aoi who had said she would remain neutral despite sharing his fate as his vessel.
He saw a small figure when he looked in the living room. It appeared to be a boy. The boy came up to about Kyousuke’s waist and there was no need to wonder whose past this was showing.
The figure was not looking at him.
Kyousuke followed the boy’s gaze.
The living room was directly connected to the dining room and kitchen.
There was a simple reason why the walls had been removed to secure such a large space in that small house. Doctor S had wanted a 20m space for performing the Blood-Sign Summoning Ceremony indoors.
There was a dull thud as a 180cm rod was tossed to the small boy’s feet.
But that was not the only sound.
A similar thud came from the dining room.
Only now could Kyousuke see the man in a lab coat standing on the border between living and dining room. It was his father, Doctor S, who had seemed so big and strong at the time and had been a symbol of fear and death. …But even that had been a lie. His mother and *little sister* had been

in on it. They must have all been laughing at Kyousuke as they surrounded him.
So this had been inevitable.
The Blood-Sign Summoning Ceremony could not be done alone. Not only did the summoner need a vessel, but they also needed an opponent.
Who had Doctor S thrown a Blood-Sign to as his opponent?
Who was in the dining room?
“I don’t believe it.”
Not even Meinokawa Aoi could remain emotionless when she saw this.
There was another child there.
The girl there was just as little as Kyousuke, if not more so.
“The experiment has arrived at its final stage,” said Doctor S.
He was a man with slender jaw and black hair exposed.
He spoke with a solemn voice that made it sound like he had mistaken himself for the god of this small space.
His words might be of no use anywhere else, but they ruled this home.
His voice sounded different from the present, but that was likely due to the lack of the oxygen mask. This would be what he originally sounded like.
But Kyousuke had changed a lot too.
He had been made into a precision-guided missile, he had rejected that, he had completed himself again, and he had repeated the process.
It was the end of that painful process that had made Kyousuke who he was today.
The man was a thrill seeker.
Instead of rejecting fear, he secured his own safety so he could enjoy it as much as he liked.
“Or rather, drawing it out any longer would lead to diminishing returns, so I should view this as a success. It is time for the final appraisal. …A deadly battle between brother and *sister*. Whichever one summons the White Queen first will be declared a success. The success will be passed on to the next experiment to preserve the valuable data and samples. The other will be unnecessary and will be disposed of along with the house.”
They were frightening words.
There was no scorn or hatred there. He was simply providing a matter-of-fact report on the situation. And Doctor S would follow through on that. His previous actions had made that clear enough.
The small boy did not pick up the Blood-Sign at his feet.
He desperately shouted something while too upset to string together coherent sentences. But he must not have expected his words to get through to Doctor S because he instead directed them to his *little sister* who stood in the dining room like his mirror image.
“Laugh,” spat out the present Kyousuke with obvious self-deprecation in his voice. “I really thought she would understand. Unlike Doctor S, I thought my mom and *little sister* would still listen to me. But they were all in on it together. Worse, they had joined on thinking they were just playing a simple

role, but after getting beating and bearing so much needless pain, they ended up hating me from the bottom of their hearts."
"Don't be silly, boy." Meinokawa Aoi had clear anger in her voice. "Just looking at you over there, you've clearly been without food for at least two days and now your own father is ordering you to fight, yet there you are showing more concern for your *little sister* than yourself. How could I laugh at someone like that? In the present, you are a shockingly cowardly hero, but things were different back then. This is the same as your logic behind hating the White Queen, so I choose to root for you before you did anything wrong."
"…"
No amount of sentimentality would change anything.
This was a vision of the past. It had all already happened.
"Hm?" Doctor S actually sounded surprised. "Do you think you actually have a choice in the matter?"
The *little sister* looked more frightened than Kyousuke. Looking back at the scene, she may have been giving him a look that said "I thought we were a team."
"Surely you aren't that stupid. I have kept a careful balance in all the previous abuse. I filled the cup to the limit, but it never did overflow. So did you think things would work out today as well? Did you think I would at least spare your life?"
It was all meaningless effort.
This was the madman who had designed the nightmare to apply so much pressure to Kyousuke, so any plea to his sense of camaraderie was bound to fall on deaf ears. He did not speak the same language. The word "team" meant very different things to him and the rest of the family.
So…
"Then let me show you how wrong you are."
There was a horribly light bang of gunpowder.
They must not have known what it meant at first.
Had he done that just to push them further?
Really?
For no other reason than that!? When they were supposed to be husband and wife!?
Someone else had always been there. She had not been a powerful enough presence to shield the young siblings from danger, but she had to have brought them some gentleness and kindness. She had to have provided some kind of support.
Looking back, it would have been an act to set Kyousuke up, but that kindness still had to have saved his young heart countless times.
But now there was a dark red hole in her chest.
Even though she was supposed to be Kyousuke's mother and Doctor S's wife.

“Do you get it now? When you don’t need something anymore, you get rid of it.”
Research.
This man measured the value of all things through that lens, so he had no problem spouting such nonsense with a smile.
Was he insane or not?
The young siblings must have immediately realized just how foolish it would be to pursue that question. When an absolute monarch was wrong, pointing it out would only get you killed. Revealing the true nature of the emperor’s new clothes was not the end of the story.
A small hand grabbed a Blood-Sign.
The first to do so was the *little sister*. Now there was no changing what happened. The boy continued to shake his head in protest, but the *little sister* spoke in a low, dark, and heavy voice.
Every time Kyousuke made a mistake, she was the one who was beaten in his place.
She must have been laughing alongside Doctor S at first, but at some point she had lost any trust in that supposed ally.
Only then had she realized that she was as trapped as Kyousuke was.
“At this rate, we’ll die first.”
“You can’t, *****. You can’t save anyone by doing what he says!!”
“It’s all, all, all, all ————’s fault.”
She was driven by fear.
But her eyes also contained the aggressiveness of a rusted blade.
“It wasn’t supposed to be like this. It was supposed to be an act. So why does he have to hit me? Why does this have to happen to me!? I’m not like ————!! Mom and I were supposed to be the ones laughing!! We – mom and I – weren’t supposed to be part of this. It’s all ————’s fault!!!!!”
There was a click as an Incense Grenade pin was pulled.
Shiroyama Kyousuke raised a meaningless cry as he kicked up the Blood-Sign and grabbed it in both hands.
Their vessels were the disposable mass-produced ones that Doctor S specialized in. In this case, they were silkworms, aka moth larvae. They were probably the smallest scale of the animal vessels. Basically, beneficial bugs tended to become deified. And these larvae had no venom and their mandibles were too weak to bite into human flesh. They were weak to environmental changes and difficult to raise, but they could be raised in large numbers for a much lower cost than a white snake or tiger.
Everything was in place.
So everyone knew what had to come next.
Kyousuke had the Original Red (b). Regulation-class. Sound Range: Low. Cost: 1.
The *little sister* had the Original Green (k). Regulation-class. Sound Range: Middle. Cost: 1.

Both of them commanded colorful slime, but it did not end there. The two Blood-Signs sliced through the air, launched White Thorns, and knocked the floating red Petals into the holes known as Spots. In no time, the Materials were remade into something much more brutal and powerful.
Young Kyousuke only saw one option.
“I’ll kill Doctor S and end this!!!!!!”
“Oops.”
That was all Doctor S said while leaning against the wall inside the Artificial Sacred Ground without a protective barrier.
Yet the Material did not actually attack his hated father. It instead clashed with the monster summoned by the *little sister* he wanted to protect.
“Have you forgotten the basics, Kyousuke? Under normal circumstances, I would have had to beat your *little sister* yet again.”
“…!!”
“A summoner can only summon the Material and strengthen it. It is the vessel’s job to control the Material. …And who was it that developed that silkworm vessel? It has an understanding with me, not you. Isn’t that right???”
He could not escape these hopeless rails.
That man had whispered that he would spare them if she hit her brother, so now young Kyousuke was forced to essentially kill the family member he had shared such an abusive life with.
The piece of shit behind it all was right there, but he could not break free and attack the man.
“Then I won’t even use the Material. I can still kill you if I drive this Blood-Sign through your throat!!!!!”
“If you could pull that off, then you should have attacked me in my sleep, you stupid child. Besides, is this any time to work off stress by shouting threats you can’t follow through on? The more obedient child has been strengthening her Material this entire time.”
“What are you doing, *****!?”
“That’s what makes her so very boring. She can do pretty well, but she can’t hold it together when something surprises her. To be honest, I’m hoping you will win this one.”
Now, would anyone actually be delighted to hear their abusive father say they had a talent for violence?
The answer…might surprise you.
“Why is it always ————?”
A voice of pure resentment reached their ears.
But it was not just lamenting the hopeless state of their family.
“Why do you always focus on him!? I do everything like I’m supposed to, but all you ever do is hit me!!”
Extremely biased values tended to rear their ugly head in closed environments. For example, in schools. College-prep schools, technical schools, boy’s schools, and girl’s schools would all have their unique colors.

Philanthropists ranked themselves based on how much they had helped people and prisoners formed a hierarchy based on the scope of their crimes, with criminal organizations at the top.
This was the same.
In this thoroughly rotten household environment, someone had decided they wanted their father's praise no matter what form it took. She knew it was wrong, but there were still times when she wanted to escape the abuse like that.
She wanted to be told "good job".
She wanted what most children took for granted.
But Doctor S did not sound remotely interested, despite being the root cause of it all.
"Do something about her, Onii-chan."
"Kh."
"This is your last chance. If she successfully summons the White Queen and becomes a *completed* summoner, there will be no stopping her. Being the strongest is a tragic thing. Even if you become a tyrannical ruler, no one will dare criticize you for it. No one wants to die, do they? So they'll all plaster creepy smiles on their faces and insist you aren't slaughtering people. They will swear up and down those are the deeds of a proper hero, saint, and genius! Ah ha ha!!"
"Ahhhh

look at Johann Weyer's Pseudomonarchia Daemonum. Beelzebub is the ruler and Lucifer is only one of the officials."
That meant he only had to switch to some other Divine-class, but that meant a slight time loss.
And when the change was forced onto him by outside circumstances rather than his own plan, his options were drastically reduced. And a reduction in options could easily mean incredible risk.
"You can do better than that. Right, Onii-chan?" Doctor S chuckled while still leaning back against the wall. "Weren't you going to save your mother and *little sister* from your cruel father one day? Well, that day happened to be today. You weren't in time for your mother, but what about your *little sister*? What will happen to her if you let go now? Which one of you will reach out for that monster? If you don't stop her now, the entire world will turn on her."
"Shut
uuuu

She would not last. The *little sister* would be defeated. Kyousuke quickly tried to summon a different Unexplored-class, but that was no more than switching around without building the Material up any further. He was approaching a dead end.
Brother and *sister*.
This battle would never end unless one of them ended it. And they had already arrived at the Unexplored-class. The end was nigh. They would summon the White Queen. Once they reached that point, it was all over. Only the winner would survive. The one whose skill was not up to snuff would be disposed of in accordance with the withdrawal manual. That ridiculous plan would become a reality!!
“I will win.”
Resentment filled her voice.
His *little sister* had absorbed the information too well.
“I will win, win, win!! I will win and survive! I swear I will, no matter what it takes!!”
“No, you idiot!! What future will you have if you survive by doing what that awful man says!?”
Yelling would not stop time.
She was going to reach that point.
The situation was approaching the theoretical limit.
They could practically see the pure white already.
iu – nu – fb – a – wuh – ei –kx – eu – pl – vjz.
“Just one letter.”
Kyousuke must not have had a long-term plan for victory.
He just wanted to delay the ending as much as possible.
That was the only thing on his mind.
“If I can get her to miss just one letter!! If I can stop her from completing the name!!”
This resulted in a fight over an “f”.
The *little sister* used a forceful power shot and young Kyousuke used a spinning trick shot.
That Petal would normally just be one of many, but in this moment, its value skyrocketed. Both Kyousuke and his *little sister* sharply launched a White Thorn toward it.
And.
While young Kyousuke continued fighting in the illusion, the Shiroyama Kyousuke watching it groaned some words.
“You don’t have to watch.”
“Which one of you ultimately summoned the White Queen?”
“It doesn’t really matter.”
There was no hope in those words.
“Wishes don’t come true.”

Part 6

The first step was crucial in all things.
If you did not stand on the starting line, you had no chance whatsoever of winning first prize.
The midsummer sun ruled the clear blue sky and the few cumulonimbus clouds, but the surface was filled with even more energy.
“W-wait, aren’t we getting ahead of ourselves here? How will this help me learn *what it means to be human*? We haven’t solved all the mysteries surrounding my brother yet.”
“Oh, shut up. You and Kyousuke-chan need to get closer before we can do anything about the world! And that means one of you needs to approach the other. We both know Kyousuke-chan is too stubborn to do it, so that means it’s up to you to approach him!!”
They seemed to be flirting in front of the show windows along the midair walkway of the shopping center’s second floor.
Waitress Demon Biondetta moved behind the barelegged casual dress White Queen, grabbed her slender shoulders, and pushed her in front of one show window in particular.
“Time for a change of clothes.”
“Eek!”
“Time – for – a – change – of – clothes!! I mean, you’ve been wearing that dress since Kingdom F just because it was on hand! It’s lazy!! That’s why you’re showing off your thighs like that and your clothes should mean something when you’re meeting a boy! So come here!!”
“Wait, um, Shigara Masami, please say something.”
<Yes, I really should set an upper limit. Try to keep it under 30,000 yen, okay?>
After she was betrayed with a smile, the White Queen was dragged away by everyone’s big sister, Biondetta.
And from inside…
“You don’t need to make up your mind right away. Queen, let’s start with the standard options. So how about this?”
“Wait, how is that standard!? And can you even call it clothing when so much of it is see-through? Are you sure this isn’t a kind of underwear?”
“If you want to go the boyish route, this would be the way to go. Try on this T-shirt and shorts.”

“I didn’t know they made shorts that short. Japan’s extinct bloomers would cover up more.”
“Oh, that’s not a bad idea, actually. Wanna try some on?”
“Do I need to explain why they were driven extinct!?”
“Yeah, but Kyousuke-chan is ultra dense, so if you don’t make your intentions super obvious, he won’t catch on. Maybe this femdom police uniform? Ooh, or this riding suit.”
“A bunny? Cat ears??? Are you sure this is a clothing store and not a party goods shop!?”
“C’mon, Queen, hurry it up! There’s still a ton more to try on, so you need to get a new outfit on at least once every two minutes!!”
“Wait, this is the dressing room!! Don’t just open the curtain like that!!!!!!”
Shigara Masami sighed.
She had lost her chance by just watching them go.
She regretted not joining in like she had wanted to.
The Multiple shopping center was supported by the three pillars of food, clothing, and electronics, but the shops along the midair walkway were mostly interior and accessory shops rather than the necessities. The White Queen had been so uncharacteristically timid because of the many couples gifts they offered like pair rings and mugs.
The non-automatic glass door burst open.
<Oh, my.>
Shigara Masami was surprised by what she saw.
The White Queen left the shop in something other than the short casual dress. She now wore a summery yukata with pure white lily flowers on a light blue base.
“Honestly, when this is the only decent thing in the shop, you can tell they have too much variety in a very bad sort of way.”
<I think it’s a good choice, Queen. I bet Kyousuke-kun will be surprised.>
The White Queen did look pleased.
She toyed with her silver twintails which were now tied using Japanese-style strings and she twisted her body around to look at as much of the yukata as she could manage.
But then the demon snuck up behind her.
And Biondetta whispered in her ear.
“(Uh. oh. I already did the mini-yukata thing back during the Elvast Toydream incident. I’m a little reluctant to say so, but the second yukata of the summer will have far less of an impact.)”
“!!!!!!”
The White Queen marched right back into the shop.
In the end, she was right back in her white casual dress.
“I made the right choice the first time. I need to stick with the classics if I am to keep brother’s attention!!”
“Don’t blame me if that limited-time-only shiny dress SR card is your undoing.”

Biondetta’s muttered comment was enough of a shock to the White Queen that she started trembling.
<She may not be completely off-base, Queen.> Shigara Masami laughed with a hand over her mouth. <It was a huge shock to Kyousuke-kun’s psyche when I covered for you. So even if he has been doing nothing but reject you on the surface, he is less sure deep down. It is because of his doubts and hesitation that something like this can shake him so badly. It shakes him so hard the signs show up on the surface. Or to put it much more simply, he is currently checking to make sure he has been doing the right thing all this time. He wants to know if he has gone too far even if his opponent was you, the White Queen.>
“…”
The White Queen could not immediately respond to that.
Even though she was known for her wisdom and beauty as much as for her extreme violence.
“Well, I know I can’t go too far. I want him to look my way. That is the only thing on my mind and I have done so much to achieve it.”
<It is because you can think of it that way that are worrying over how to approach him now. In a way, things are a lot easier when you’re up against a mindless and absolute evil. But that isn’t the case here. Although he really should have known that as far back as the Queen’s Miniature Garden.>
That failure had left him afraid.
It had felt like a punishment against the fools who tried to measure the White Queen by human standards.
So he had mentally sealed her away.
He had decided she was fundamentally incomprehensible and an absolute evil, so there was no need to even try reasoning with her.
She was starting to see the answer in her *journey to learn what it means to be human*.
<It’s like how a kitten learns. When a kitten hops up onto the stove and gets burned, it will never approach the stove again. The same happens if it nearly drowns in the tub or sink. Kyousuke-kun has set up rules for himself to avoid danger based on his own experiences. He has told himself he will suffer a fatal wound if he approaches you.>
This was further complicated by the fact that Kyousuke was a combat expert. He would fight with everything he had even if it was just to escape danger. Because he could never defeat this opponent under normal circumstances, he honed himself for combat as much as possible to increase his odds of success.
A similar phenomenon could be seen in adult society. When people were able to logically explain their emotions, they would quickly justify their actions and refuse to change. In a way, using the phrase “I’m doing nothing wrong” as a weapon could produce pleasure signals.
They were producing results, so they felt no one could complain.

And in fact, how many people had actually protested what Freedom Award 903 was doing? Freedom Award 3000, Shigara Masami, had become a crucial turning point as far as that was concerned.
But the White Queen shook her head in her thin casual dress.
“He isn’t wrong, though.”
<It covers too wide a range. Queen, it is true you are a higher being who is much too risky for people to try to contact and use. But at the same time, it is unnatural and frankly impossible for anyone to remain entirely unaffected by you. If someone decides to stay away from all water for fear of drowning, they will have nothing to drink and they will die of thirst.> Shigara Masami relaxed her shoulders at this point. <To be blunt, everyone is influenced by you in some way just by living in this world. It doesn’t matter if we’re talking about a normal person with no knowledge of the Blood-Sign Summoning Ceremony or an extraterrestrial lifeform in the far-off reaches of space. Queen, that is how much weight your existence carries. It is a basic fact of life with no room for issues of morality or preference. It is on the same level as no one getting motion sickness from the rotation of the galaxy or feeling nauseated by the flow of time.>
Shigara Masami had researched it all as something that simply existed, so that was how she viewed the laws of the universe. Those laws were simply there and not even the people who discovered them could alter them based on their personal plans. They were not something you could resist or push back against. The heliocentric model had overturned the geocentric model, so everyone just had to accept it and keep living.
But Kyousuke refused to accept it.
To him, a black hole was no more than an all-destroying incarnation of evil. He did not stop to consider the fact that the gravity that caused the black hole was what allowed people to keep their feet on the ground. He had learned to avoid danger just like a kitten, so he kept away from the White Queen without checking to see whether that would really be beneficial or not. He had discovered this new law, so it was his responsibility. He had to cross out the simple equation to protect the world.
And the Colorless Little Girl was the two lines he used to cross it out.
It may have seemed like a good idea to his juvenile sense of justice, but from the viewpoint of a researcher, it was something he never should have done. There was no such thing as absolute justice. Kyousuke was wrong for trying to reject the White Queen’s absolute authority to do whatever she pleased, but from someone else’s point of view, Shigara Masami was wrong to shake her ponytailed head in response to Kyousuke’s decision.
<There is an extremely simple way to show a kitten there is nothing to be afraid of.> Shigara Masami raised her index finger like a teacher. <Just place it on the stove or in the bathtub. Take the kitten to the site of its painful experience and overwrite that with a new experience. It’s very simple, Queen. Human history and the fate of the world is really just a collection of people doing just that.>

“And that…”
The White Queen knew what the researcher in a lab coat and suit was trying to say.
But she frowned and pointed into a show window.
“…is this?”
“Hwa ha ha. I call it Operation Gift Giving!! Giving physical form to unseen things is always the most effective method. Now, it’s usually the guy who gives the girl a bag or a ring, but if you wait for that the densest boy alive to figure out what you want, you’ll be waiting until the end of time. So go find something you like and have an employee wrap it up all nice for you!!”
Now.
That was a little much to throw at the White Queen all of a sudden.
She pressed her soft hands to her cheeks as she worried over it. She had done plenty of complaining about Kyousuke and how obsessed with fighting he was, but she was much the same. She had tended in that direction when she followed Alice (with) Rabbit’s style to get his attention. She had ended up thinking of everything in terms of fighting. She was not sure what to think or say when asked to approach this from a more normal angle.
“This is all so sudden. …But I can think of several ways of surprising my brother.”
“It doesn’t count if it would make him cry.”
“…”
“W-wait. Why do you look depressed? Hold on!! You can’t do that to me! If the boke doesn’t do their part, the tsukkomi just looks like an asshole!”
Why did emotionally unstable people get so serious out of nowhere like that?
As the life of the party, Biondetta Onee-chan knew it was her job to cheer everyone back up.
“Just picture it!! Let’s say you set aside Blood-Signs, Materials, and all that stuff and go on a date like a normal boy and girl! What would you want to do!? Don’t lie to yourself with this serious aura! C’mon, you wanna do all sorts of flirty things with Kyousuke-chan, don’t you!?”
“W-wait, don’t say that so loud! What if someone hears you? Oh, dear. This is the popular destination for dates, isn’t it? I just realized. Kyah☆”
<Biondetta-chan, step away from her immediately. Touch the Queen when she’s electrified from embarrassment and you’ll be blown to smithereens.>
The hem of the white casual dress fluttered and the White Queen floated up into the air a bit. To keep everyone safe, she established a ground line to allow all the energy escape and the earth had to work overtime to absorb it all.
<It doesn’t have to be anything special. Just choose something you want to give to Kyousuke-kun.>
“…”
This effort was almost guaranteed to be wasted.

The world was not simple enough for anything else. No matter how much the White Queen approached him, Shiroyama Kyousuke would slap her hand away with pure hostility. If she wrapped up her weak and gentle side and handed it to him, he would only throw it to the ground and stomp on it. She had done enough to deserve it.
The White Queen was aware of that.
But.
Even so.
(I don't care.)
She bit her lip as she thought.
(If it won't reach him, I just have to keep it up until it does. If he won't accept it, I just have to keep it up until he does. The impending rupture of the cocoon is no excuse. In fact, the idea that you have to push everything else aside because of an emergency is the reason the world has accepted everything I've done.)
Shiroyama Kyousuke knew the pain of having your feelings stomped on. That was why he had never accepted it when others played the historian by saying "can you really blame them when you look at the big picture?"
(I won't make any excuses. I won't confront him with the emergency known as the White Queen. In fact, I've attempted this so many times before. I'm just changing my method this time. So even if he throws it down and stomps on it, it's sure to become the foundation of something. In the final moment before the cocoon ruptures and the Colorless Little Girl starts to move.)
Shigara Masami and Biondetta had said something worrying.
They had said Shiroyama Kyousuke could become an even greater monster than her if the circumstances were right.
She had to prevent that at all costs. He was like a kitten. He had established his own rules based on his past experiences and that had led to creating the irregular rule known as the Colorless Little Girl. And there was no guarantee he would stop there this time, so if she was to soften the result before that happened, she had to make him a normal boy again.
When her thoughts reached that point, she tugged down the bottom of her short dress with one hand and shook her head.
<Queen?>
"No," she faced her own thoughts once more. "*That won't work.* I'm pretending I understand, but I'm really just interpreting it through the Blood-Sign System and using logic to justify my actions."
That was a very embarrassing thing.
She did not want anyone other than herself to go on that kind of rampage.
There was something she could see now thanks to her *journey to learn what it means to be human*.
It might seem silly after the mess she had made of the world. Shiroyama Kyousuke was certainly not going to forgive her. But even so, she had to face her own thoughts. She was supposed to be accepting that she had been

wrong all this time, so why was she trying to save face by coming up with logical excuses for her actions? No one needed excuses for their feelings. Her feelings might not reach the boy she loved and he might cruelly trample on them. It might take tens of thousands of attempts for a miracle to finally occur. The cocoon and the Colorless Little Girl might be on the verge of destroying the entire world. But none of that was a reason for taking this lightly. None of it was an excuse for holding back during this final day. The situation was not going to change the feelings in her heart.

There was no need to keep those feelings inside.

She no longer needed her hedgehog spines or her charisma that masked her true essence.

She had to face him without hiding anything.

What did it matter if he rejected her, trampled on her, and scoffed at her? That boy had taught her what to do.

He had always crawled through his own coughed up blood while reaching toward an unachievable goal.

If she had not learned anything from that, it would mean everything in this world was a lie.

“That’s right.”

The girl had made up her mind.

The gears turning inside her were entirely different from the usual ones and they transferred a great power.

“Then I will take one of these. Yes, and wrap it in red and black.”

She had to face defeat.

A blow to this would mean this attempt shattered in failure. But that could still produce something.

However, would it happen before the world ended?

Part 7

And.
And.
And.
It felt like that single second of time stretched out for an eternity. And in that place, it was possible time really was being distorted.
The color white blew through a small house.
It had all begun in July of 1999.
Doctor S's research group had completed their theory, but something was missing when they tried to do it in practice. They only managed to see some light and the White Queen never actually took form. It was an imperfect result.
With a complete failure, he might have given up.
With a complete success, he might have been satisfied.
The imperfection of it was the problem. It was that longing that grasped Doctor S's heart and would not let go. It was his desire to reach one result or the other that had created this hell.
That was why he had not built a grand temple or a cold lab. In a way, it had been inevitable that those wings of light would descend upon that completely ordinary looking house. The house had been built for this purpose. It was a type of "door" of uncanny thickness created by young blood, sweat, and tears.
"So we meet again, Queen."
Doctor S sounded like he was speaking to an old friend.
"And welcome to our world."
The world's first complete summoning of the White Queen was underway.
The fact of the summoning would remain the same no matter which sibling arrived there first. And the one who summoned her would swiftly crush the other to prove which one it had been.
"So which one was it?" Meinokawa Aoi was focused on the vision of the past. "Which one summoned her and won?"
The grown Shiroyama Kyousuke could not bear to watch.
And he spoke in perfect unison with the small boy.
"That's enough!! Please don't!!"
"That's enough!! Please don't!!"

That suggested it was his *little sister* who had reached the White Queen first. Had young Kyousuke been devoured and his *little sister* was taken away by Doctor S as the success?
“Please. I beg you.”
“Please. I beg you.”
But no.
That was not what happened. He had more to say.
“Please don’t appear!! I don’t want to win!! I don’t want to hurt my *little sister*!! So…so…so just let me save her!!!!!!”
“Please don’t appear!! I don’t want to win!! I don’t want to hurt my *little sister*!! So…so…so just let me save her!!!!!!”

Part 8

At that time, the White Queen had long since grown bored with everything. She had already defeated the laws meant to stop her tyranny in the other world – in other words, the Unexplored-class.
The door to this world had opened in July of 1999, but what had she found waiting for her there? Those humans had talked big about conquering the occult with technology, but when the light of a mere fraction of the White had touched them, they had easily succumbed and become yet more worshipers.
There was nothing certain there.
Even though she had wanted something sturdy enough to attach her lifeline to.
"…"
Two young siblings had been abused and then ordered to battle each other by their own father. It was a cheap tragedy that felt like a hackneyed drama dragged out into reality. So many people had sought the White Queen for salvation, so this was not going to move her heart. She would simply destroy things, people would say she had brought salvation, and another lovely story would be passed around without her knowledge. She was honestly sick of it. She was sure they would come to her with tears in their eyes, show off how tragic their situation was, and demand she share her blessings with them. People seemed to think they could get away with anything if they could move you to emotion.
And that was why.
"That's enough!! Please don't!!"
Those hopelessly incoherent words rang loud in her ears.
She felt their weight directly in her heart.
For the first time, the White Queen felt the weight of the world.
"Please. I beg you."
She knew what it meant.
She trembled.
Here was someone who would reject her despite knowing who she was.
Here was someone who would stay true to their beliefs even when awash with her overwhelming white light. She had wanted someone she could attach her lifeline to. Was this that person?
Was finding someone who could support her really such a pleasant feeling?

“Please don’t appear!! I don’t want to win!! I don’t want to hurt my *little sister*!! So…so…so just let me save her!!!!!!”
So while trembling, the White Queen asked a question of the world’s knowledge. She asked a question of something that would drive a normal human mad if they simply gazed upon it.
What is that?
“A predecessor, one who shows the way, one you can rely upon, the master of an apprentice.”
The answer was simple.
When she searched that knowledge it always provided the same result.
“In other words, a being known as an older brother.”
The White Queen found herself tracing a finger along her own lips.
She did not really know what that word meant, but her trembling lips repeatedly sounded it out.
“Brother…”
She had established a definition for herself.
And she quickly responded to the summons from the human world.
“Brother!!”

Part 9

So in the end, it did not really matter which of the siblings summoned the White Queen.
From the moment the Queen responded to the summons, she had intended to protect Shiroyama Kyousuke.
“Ah…”
The young, young girl felt fear.
But the White Queen did not care.
That was the enemy.
That was the enemy who intended to harm Shiroyama Kyousuke.
So what she needed to do could not have been more obvious. An Unexplored-class Material and the summoner’s protective circle were trivial matters. The White Queen had decided to do something and that was the one and only absolute rule.
She looked to the young girl.
Did the girl even realize her fate had been decided in that moment?
“Help m-…”
She did not even have time to speak those two words.
A sword of concentrated white light eliminated the threat.

Part 10

“Ah, ahh.”
Not even the theory of relativity could be trusted in that warped coordinate.
A voiceless voice rang out.
No matter how much force was placed behind it, there was no meaning in it.
“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhh

“Good… ————, you’re still alive.”
“…”
When Doctor S had thrown out his toys, who had stolen them back and hidden them in the attic?
They might have been chosen as staff members. The mother and *little sister* might have been playing a part to set Kyousuke up.
“I finally know…what I want to say. Being praised for that was meaningless.”
But if that was all it was, she would not have had to do that behind Doctor S’s back. If she had been caught, she would only have been hurt even more.
But she had still done it for Kyousuke’s sake.
She had been unable to stick to the malicious role given to her.
“I was…wrong. I was wrong this whole time. I didn’t know how to save you. Not just today. But all this time. I’m so tired of being the good girl. So I’m glad…I finally found what to do…”
They had fought over the “f”.
They had launched their final White Thorns.
But in that moment, the *little sister*’s aim had strayed just a bit.
“No.”
He clenched his teeth and trembled.
Kyousuke shouted at the top of his lungs while holding that disconcertingly light body in his arms.
A minicar, a ball, and an animal encyclopedia.
He recalled the toys hidden in the attic. They held no strategic purpose, but they had still helped bring peace to his young heart.
And yet.
What had he just done here?
“That isn’t true!! I won’t say it! I won’t let anyone say something like this saved me!!”
“I failed…again?”
He could not nod or shake his head.
He could only wail and tremble while his *little sister* looked up at him and smiled.
“Then I’ll do better next time.”
“*****?”
She probably could not even see anymore.
But she still managed to smile like an angel and speak.
“When I’m reborn, then I’ll take your side and *help* you, Nii-sama.”
That was the end.
He almost forgot the definition of death when he saw the smile on her face.
He no longer needed words.
Kyousuke screamed so loud he thought his lungs and throat would tear, but then Doctor S, *the man with slender jaw and black hair exposed*, spoke to him.
“So it didn’t even last a full second.”

His unpleasant voice was like having someone take a file to your eardrums.
“But I learned a lot from this. Kyousuke, looks like you were the success after all. Now it’s time to analyze this result, figure out how to mass-produce it, and spread that system around. We don’t need this house anymore, so let’s clean up what we no longer need and leave.”
“…”
“That includes that filthy lump of flesh in your arms there. I don’t know why she thought she could hold onto the privileges of a good person when she was betraying you. God, and she really made a mess of things, didn’t she? This is going to be a pain to clean up. Hey, Kyousuke, I’ll take care of it, so you go take a shower and a put on some fresh clothes.”
“……”
Shiroyama Kyousuke rebooted with the stiff movements of a doll in dire need of some oil. He gently placed his *little sister*’s body on the floor and picked back up his Blood-Sign with blood-slick hands.
A red light did not do it justice.
How could you even describe the look in his eyes?
“Hm? What do you hope to do with that?”
Doctor S scoffed.
He had no trouble watching his own child soaked in blood.
“I control the silkworm vessels. Throw an Incense Grenade and you’re done for. And the battles in this cramped lab are not like those in the real world. My experience far outweighs yours in true combat using pure Materials. Do you really think a kid like you could beat me?”
He did not respond.
Shiroyama Kyousuke instead spoke to someone who was not even there.
“White Queen…”
“Wait, wait. Wait, wait, wait!! The Artificial Sacred Ground is gone and the original field has returned. You haven’t kept a Chain going, so how do you expect to get help from that higher being!? You are the product of my research, so if you keep acting so dumb, people are going to doubt my intellect!”
But Doctor S was wrong.
Why didn’t he realize the truth?
The look in Shiroyama Kyousuke’s eyes was beyond that of a hound. That boy had the eyes of an untamable and bloodthirsty wolf, so he would never pray to a higher power and rely on optimism. He would rip flesh and spill blood using a much more direct and surefire method.
So.
So.
So.
The humanoid wolf made his demand of the Queen.
“Don’t you dare interfere.”
Young Kyousuke spun his Blood-Sign like a baton.

That was as much as Doctor S could see.
It was truly like an awakening.
That fool of a researcher must have entirely forgotten the task he had set for himself.
He had used violence and abuse to draw out the killer intent and hatred needed to complete the precision-guided missile.
He had filled the boy with those emotions.
He had fit the many gears together.
And this may have been the moment when the ultimate weapon was completed.
At this point, there was no time to leisurely pull the pin of an Incense Grenade. The Blood-Sign flew, struck, jabbed, crushed, pierced, and drove all forms of destruction into the researcher’s body.
In the present day, Doctor S used an oxygen mask to regulate the amount of oxygen sent to his brain to control his emotions.
But it was not necessarily the White Queen who had made that necessary.

Part 11

Tah dah!! It is now 11 o’clock. The Colorful Sentai Hero Show is beginning, so now is your chance to gather at the central fountain plaza!!
On the midair walkway at the second floor of the Multiple shopping center, the White Queen, Shigara Masami, and Biondetta sat at a round table in front of a café. They could view the show in the plaza from a different angle here.
“Okay. Shigara Masami, you had a hot dog and a weak coffee, right?”
<Yes, with some brandy for flav-…>
“No, you fuckhead.”
<Umm, what is that you have, Biondetta-chan?>
“Eh? Just a special whip honey syrup crushed nuts caramel custard chocolate matcha strawberry milk iced latte.”
The liquids of different densities were forming layers inside. It looked more like a parfait or sundae with the colorful layers of white, pink, light green, brown, and more inside the clear container. It looked fine like that, but if she mixed it up with a spoon, it would probably form some horrific mixed drink. She had only ordered a drink, yet the ponytail researcher who had also ordered some food still seemed to have the healthier option.
“And the Queen ordered…”
“A white mocha.”
“Right, right. And you also had the white wiener in a steamed white bun with cream cheese.”
“If only I could have gotten a cauliflower and white asparagus salad and some milk custard for dessert. …Oh? Why are you two looking at me like that?”
“…”
“…”
It was all extremely white. In clothing and food, she really was the White Queen. She was generally perfect in every way, but there was definitely something wrong with her taste in colors. It would be one thing if she were making it herself, but it looked far more bizarre when she managed to get it all to match when eating out.
There was a small box unrelated to the food sitting on their table.
She must have had the boy’s tastes in mind because it was wrapped in red wrapping paper with a black bow.
It was about the right size to hold a large apple.

<A mug, hm?>
“Nee shee shee. With a bunny on it to boot.”
Shiroyama Kyousuke would eat nothing but cereal given the option, but he had shared a cake with everyone back in the Queen’s Miniature Garden. He was not entirely immune to luxuries.
The White Queen faintly smiled while gripping the skirt of her thin casual dress below the table.
“Yes, but he isn’t going to accept it.”
Even the noise of the cheerful hero show seemed to grow more distant.
An eerie wind seemed to blow through.
“But even if he throws it to the ground and stomps on it, I will just do the same thing again. I will do everything I can until the very moment the cocoon and Colorless Little Girl burst. This is the first step. I just have to think of it as the foundation for teaching brother he was mistaken about the danger, like a kitten on the stove.”
<Non.>
However, Shigara Masami was quick to correct her.
<Have you learned nothing on this journey, Queen? The feelings behind this aren’t that shallow, are they?>
The White Queen’s expression silently changed when she heard that. And she covered her face with her hands before anyone could tell what emotion had caused the change.
She knew it would never happen.
Failure was inevitable.
And yet.
And yet.
And yet.
“…Hey.”
She spoke quietly while covering her face and hanging her head.
“I really want you to accept this, brother.”
That was her wish.
You did not make wishes because you could see a realistic way to achieve them.
You made wishes specifically because you knew they could never come true.

Part 12

He had seen everything.
He had learned everything.
Finally, Shiroyama Kyousuke had retrieved the blotted-out faces of his mother and *little sister*.
But there was no chance of speaking to either one as both had been killed.
Time was distorted in this place, but he still forgot all about the flow of time for a moment.
“Are you satisfied?”
He had more than just his “help me” syndrome.
He had gone on a rampage of his own.
He was a human with every last emotion that entailed and there was definite shame and resentment in his voice.
“Are you satisfied now, Meinokawa Aoi? If so, then laugh. Look down on me like you always do. Say you’ve taken a neutral position so my sob story is none of your concern!!”
The silver-haired shrine maiden said nothing for a while.
She simply embraced Kyousuke’s head and held him to her sarashi-bound chest. She had felt it was necessary. If she simply accepted it all, she was no different from the White Queen. There were times when she had to push him away to apply the brakes. But this was the result? She regretted it now, wishing she had been kinder to him.
He could be a child throwing a fit if need be.
As long as there was a human heart behind it.
The Shiroyama Kyousuke before her now was battered, pitiful, and had cast aside the title of strongest, but he was not the precision-guided missile some odious person had designed him as.
For that at least, she was glad.
He had broken free of those chains, saved a great many people, and stood here now.
He could be proud of that.
His life might have been a series of losses to the White Queen, but there was no need to look down on the path he had taken.
“Cry.”
“Shut up.”
“Boy, don’t bottle it up any longer. This is what it means to be human, right?”

“I said shut up!!”
And.
While holding the trembling boy, Aoi bit her lip and finally opened her mouth once more.
“But still.”
She knew not all of it had been right.
She hesitated and questioned it, but she still spoke to the boy at her chest.
“I cannot bring myself to place the blame on you or the White Queen. You were desperately trying to find a way to save your family to the very last moment and she was only protecting you, even if she was oblivious to what her actions would mean. The blame clearly lies with Doctor S, does it not?”

I know that, you idiot.
The White Queen and I thought the same thing during the Secret War.
I joined a plan to kill her, but I let my emotions get the better of me and befriended her.
I baselessly thought it might turn out all right.
I wanted us to be happy.
I wanted to live alongside her.
But.
In the end.
Nothing changed.
She hadn’t learned her lesson. It felt like she was denying my *little sister*’s death.
So I had no idea what to do.

Part 13

The White Queen suddenly looked up.
Without warning, the barelegged girl in a casual dress provided an oracle.
“Brother is coming.”
Shigara Masami and Biondetta’s expressions changed.
Just like always, if the White Queen said so, then it had to be true.

Sinceria Report 05

“…”
“Do we really have to keep researching, mom? Are you sure you aren’t using this to stay away from Onii-chan after what happened last night!?”
Despite what Olivia said, Sinceria continued her investigation.
This time, she had set her sights on Isabelle and Murasame Kuina.
Two vessels was an unusual pairing, but the report she had read said they were split between enemy and ally during the battle against Biondetta.
“Shiroyama Kyousuke?”
“Ugh. Why do you have to bring up someone like him after intruding on our class trip?”
The girl with short blonde hair was Isabelle. The one with brown hair was Kuina. It was surprising, but Isabelle’s real name was Kawamo Sayuri and she was Japanese despite her skin, eye, and hair color. The very structure of her body had been changed by the Anthill experiment led by Government.
(Yes, that’s right. I am not the only one. This girl must be the same. She must be just as strong as me after the changes to her soul from making contracts with so many different summoners. Hee hee hee. Ah ha ha. So no one can call me a mountain gorilla. That hunk of junk should really be calling me an absolute monarch with unparalleled beauty. Mutter, mutter.)
“I guess we can talk, but could we move into the shade first? This girl is surprisingly frail, so she could get heatstroke if we stand out in the sun for too long.”
“Gwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”
“Calm down, my queen!!”
Her faithful knight managed to restrain her and prevented anything unfortunate from occurring.
The doll-like girl called Isabelle silently tilted her head.
“My impression of Shiroyama Kyousuke? Hmm (deadpan).”
It took her a while.
But once short-tempered Olivia started getting irritated, she finally answered.
“A baby?”
“Bffh!?”
Everyone else spat out the contents of their mouths. That word had come as a complete surprise.
But it did not look like Isabelle was trying to be weird.

“It is true he is a top-level summoner, but he doesn’t give any thought to what happens after he saves someone. He goes around saving a super-sized amount of people and then just leaves them there like a baby that gets tired of playing with his toys and falls asleep.”
Sinceria flapped her mouth wordlessly and glanced over at Murasame Kuina, but the brown-haired girl only gave an exaggerated shake of her head.
“S-sorry. I was with his enemy, Biondetta, so I didn’t spend any time with him. But I think we can trust what Sayuri says. Still…a baby???”
“I don’t think he knows how to maintain a connection with other people. Not even a small-sized amount.”
Isabelle’s cold eyes did not even waver as she said that.
She had approached the crux of the issue.
“Whether you’re talking about a parent, a sibling, a friend, or a lover, he does not think the connections between people can or should ever change. He thinks they should never change or be altered. That is why he cannot forgive the incidents caused by the White Queen or her worshipers when they shake and sever those bonds. And at the same time, he does not think ‘merely’ saving someone can create such powerful bonds. Yes, he does not think even that can change things. So when the incident is over, he always severs his contract with the vessel and irresponsibly returns them to the world they left behind. Grr, grr (deadpan).”
“…”
Merely saving someone could not create an eternal bond.
Was that a concept he came up with so he could reject the link between the White Queen and her worshipers?
“The thing is.”
Most likely, that was a view of him exclusive to someone who had been with him during that specific time.
The quantity and quality of the time was not the issue. This was a puzzle piece only seen in the time Isabelle had spent with him, so not even Meinokawa Higan, Librarian-chan, Himekawa Mika, Sekurtiti, Lu Niang Lan, Olivia Highland, or Meinokawa Aoi could have provided it.
“He wants love more than anyone, but he does not know how to accept love. So he respects anyone who can do it. It has nothing to do with the Summoning Ceremony or Awards. I do not know how he ended up like that. I fought alongside him against Biondetta, but I did not see his past. *It isn’t about whether or not he is broken. What matters is that he knows he is broken.* So he has drawn a line in the sand and he makes sure not to drag anyone else down with him. Because he does not want to destroy everything around him with his combat-oriented rules. And yet he does not actually know if that caution is even necessary.”
Silence followed.
No one could say a word.

Even the wind had died on that midsummer day. That was how long it took for them all to process the information Isabelle had given them.
“In other words.”
Finally, Sinceria Highland restarted the stopped time.
“Kyousuke is suffering from a love deficiency, so what is it he needs? Nothing could be more obvious! It is finally my time to shine!! Now, does he want my love as a woman, a ruler, or a mother!!!???”
“Oh, no. That would be too much of a shock to Onii-chan’s system when he’s so exhausted. He really would develop a mother complex then.”

Facts

- Sinceria's long ears are a sign of structural changes on the skeletal level that make her more powerful than she looks.
- There is no Award called "Gorilla who rips off the heads of any female vessels she sees near the (much younger) boy she is preying on", so Sinceria can rest easy.
- The woman who was Kyousuke's mother and Doctor S's wife was disposed of when they withdrew from that house.
- The White Queen was only summoned for less than a second. It can be speculated that the data was erased from the world because she was trying to protect someone for the first time ever and did not know how to hold back.
- It is unclear whether Kyousuke or his *little sister* summoned the White Queen. Based on what they said afterwards, the odds are good it was Kyousuke. But either way, the Queen killed his *little sister* to protect him. The driving force behind the Queen has not changed since then and she made the exact same mistake when she fought to protect Kyousuke in the Secret War that affected Biondetta and Shigara Masami as well. Just because the evil deeds did not start with you does not mean anything can be forgiven unconditionally.
- Young Kyousuke was unable to hear his *little sister* finish saying "help me".
- Shiroyama Kyousuke's *little sister* seemed to call him "Nii-sama"?

Ending X-01: Light the Fuse

“–––––(The original text is too long)–––––”
“–––––(The original text is too long)–––––”
(Ending X-01 Open 08/23 12:00)
Light the Fuse

1. The White Queen had gone to the trouble of using the business hotel.
2. She had used the window to escape.
3. She had not returned to the small house.

It sounded simple enough, but those facts hinted at something important. How about we figure out what that is? If the White Queen would die from lack of food or sleep, she would not be such a menace, so she had to be mimicking a human lifestyle for fun or for some other reason. The fact that she used the window to escape meant she still had some attachment to these coordinates – that is, the rural city. If she had wanted to, she could have grown wings or split the dimension to escape to the other side of the planet. And she was not interested in the small house. She had gone somewhere else.

So where in the rundown rural city had the White Queen gone while mimicking a human lifestyle?

One only had to follow the local residents.

Where most of them gathered was where the White Queen was most likely to appear.

So it was only a matter of time before Shiroyama Kyousuke showed up there.

The shopping center’s fountain plaza was surrounded by tall colosseum-like walls. It was the ultimate public stage where many other people were walking around, oblivious to the danger around them.

“The afternoon Colorful Sentai Hero Show begins at 2! An unexpected helper might just make an appearance. Do not let your guard down just because you saw the morning show. Your cheers fill the heroes with strength!!”

A cheerful announcement was playing.

How much easier would life be if good and evil were so clearly defined?

Shiroyama Kyousuke and Meinokawa Aoi.

The White Queen, Shigara Masami, and Biondetta.

“It has been too long, brother.”
“Yes.”
They finally met after her journey to learn what it means to be human.
She wore a thin casual dress with her legs bare. Her silver hair was tied in twintails by cheap hair ties. She held her hands behind her back as she spoke to him.
Meanwhile, Shiroyama Kyousuke made his response.
“It really does feel like a long time since we last met.”
Was that because he had reviewed the events in that small house and regained the blotted-out faces of his mother and *little sister*?
What would have happened if the White Queen had chosen his *little sister* instead?
Or what if no one’s wish had been answered and the summoning had failed?
His life would have ended there without him ever breaking free of the small cage built by Doctor S. He was only here now because the White Queen had protected him.
In the end, it was all the same as the Queen’s Miniature Garden.
He had been weak. His strength had not been enough. He lived his life now on the backs of so many sacrifices. And the White Queen had taken on the dirty job of protecting his young life.
<You cannot defeat the White Queen with simple hatred,> said Shigara Masami while toying with the whistle around her neck. <And, Kyousuke-kun, you must have realized by now that you are not driven by some grand objective of saving the world. This is all about that one scene in that small house. Kyousuke-kun, what did you gain by learning how it all began? Did you see a single continuous line following the long, long path you have taken from the Queen’s Miniature Garden to the Colorless Little Girl?>
“…”
Everyone was telling him to accept it.
It was okay if it was embarrassing and pathetic.
He just had to be honest about the feelings in his heart. This was not about Blood-Signs or a fight to the death with a being that existed beyond the gods. He needed to gather his courage for some other purpose.
Would he say it?
Could he say it?
Was a happy ending really an option after so many people had been hurt?
Could he say “all’s well that ends well” and sweep aside the resentment and sorrow of the victims?
“How?”
Finally, he forced out the words.
“How did it all get so twisted around?”
“Boy.”
“Isn’t it because both of you were too powerful?”
Meinokawa Aoi started to say something, but Biondetta cheerfully interrupted her.

“I mean, when a teenager goes through a rebellious phase, they eventually grow out of it because it gets to be too much to bear, so they give up and compromise at some point, right? But that didn’t happen with you two. Whenever you challenged things, you actually got results. So you could keep going and going without ever hitting the wall. If you’re blindfolded and walking through the darkness, you’ll just keep walking forever if your hands never feel anything ahead of you. Even if there really are walls there and you’re breaking through them without realizing it.”
Between friends, lovers, and married couples, there was always someone who took the initiative. They might claim to be equal, but they could not actually relax without a defined position for themselves. That was what happened in the battle between Shiroyama Kyousuke and the White Queen.
No, they did have defined positions. The White Queen should have held the initiative. But Kyousuke refused to accept it. *And he refused to listen even when the Queen offered to let him have it.* The boy could not even measure the distance between them until they had settled things once and for all in combat.
He viewed everything through the lens of combat.
He could only think in those extremely simple terms.
“Think, worry, and doubt.”
Biondetta winked at him and circled behind the White Queen.
She grabbed those slender shoulders and gave her a push toward Kyousuke.
It was all wrong.
None of them were even talking about how large the cocoon had grown.
“You might not be able to make sense of your feelings, but it actually helps a lot that you can’t reach a simple answer and freeze up. Nya ha ha ha!!”
“Ah, wait!?”
<Kyousuke-kun is showing us exactly how he feels, Queen. But are you just going to go hide in hedgehog mode again?>
“~ ~ ~”
The White Queen bit her lip and blushed.
She still had her hands behind her back, so she must have been hiding something there. Her eyes wandered nervously around, but she finally seemed to make up her mind.
She held it out.
It was a small box with red wrapping paper and a black ribbon.
She was too preoccupied to worry about the short hem of her white casual dress. She restlessly rubbed together her bright and dangerously-exposed thighs.
“U-um, uh, you see, brother, I know this must be a surprise, but if…if, um, you like, could you calm down some and, um, well, try not to smash it on reflex and, uh, accept this? I would, um, very much appreciate it.”
Would this change anything?
These feelings and emotions seemed entirely removed from the Blood-Sign Summoning Ceremony, so were they really so important?

What had inspired this in her?
And.
How was he supposed to solve this mystery?
He closed his eyes once.
And he decided how he should respond to the changing times.
“I…”
He spoke from the core of his being and it felt like he was squeezing out his own blood.
This might have been far, far more difficult for him than rationally constructing the Colorless Little Girl.
The times were changing.
So the world would change too.
Shiroyama Kyousuke looked the White Queen straight in the eye and made another attempt at saying it.
“I loved…”
“Ah.”
The White Queen thought those words were going to stop her heart.
Her eyes widened.
“U-um.”
Even the nape of her neck grew pink.
Her mouth flapped wordlessly like she was having trouble breathing.
She did her best to suppress the tremor in the bright thighs below her casual dress, tears welled up in her eyes, and she tried to get confirmation just like a normal ordinary girl.
“So you mean, um…I, uh, I know I started this, but what am I supposed to do now?”
And.
And.
And.
The boy raised his head and gathered all his strength.
Shiroyama Kyousuke shouted his true feeling at the top of his lungs.
“I really did!! I loved Shigara Masami!!!!!”
<Huh?>
This was so unexpected that the ponytail woman’s mind went entirely blank, her eyes widened, and she started shaking.
She could no longer remain an outsider and let the young boy and girl handle the rest.
<Huhhhhhhhh!!!???>
It was the surprise attack to end all surprise attacks.
Shigara Masami was too shaken to calm herself, but Shiroyama Kyousuke was not done yet.
“I loved Biondetta too.”
“Oh.”
Meinokawa Aoi finally figured out what was going on.

She looked like someone who had overlooked the hints and allowed some major mistake to occur.
“Same for Shiroyama Kyoumi, Alberto, Claudia, and Cain!! I loved all of them. I couldn’t protect my real mother or *little sister*… I wanted a family!! Doctor S had denied me that in that small house and he branded me defective, saying I could never have one!! But I thought I could redo everything in the Queen’s Miniature Garden! I was touched by the Queen’s smile and supported by Shigara Masami, so I thought I could rely on that! But goddamn it all!! It just kept happening. I knew it wouldn’t work, but I still didn’t give up! I was such an idiot. I was driven out of that small house, the Queen’s Miniature Garden was destroyed, and then I just kept spouting nonsense about girls and Alices or whatever the hell, but I was really just living in a dream and chasing after illusions!! Yes, that’s right. When I saw Biondetta and Shigara Masami had turned against me here, I felt betrayed! Even though you’re not really my family!! Laugh if you want. I was nothing but a pathetic baby!!!!!”
Love came in different forms.
If Sinceria and Olivia had been here, they would have understood what Isabelle had meant.
My impression of Shiroyama Kyousuke? Hmm (deadpan).
A baby?
“I didn’t want some dangerous girlfriend. I only ever wanted one thing.”
He clenched his teeth.
He felt like he was facing his own weakness in the mirror.
So he did not hold anything back in what he said.
“I wanted a family that would keep me away from danger!! And weren’t you the one who always destroyed that, White Queen!? So no matter how unreasonable it might be and even if what you brought me was true love, I could never accept it! It was nothing but fear!! I didn’t want the love of some girlfriend who comes marching in and tears my family apart!!!!!!”
Meinokawa Aoi knew this was very bad.
She had not wanted to see Shiroyama Kyousuke and the White Q lash out at each other until they destroyed each other. She had hoped they would find some kind of emotional compromise.
(Are…)
But this was not at all what she had expected.
The situation must have already left Shigara Masami’s control.
There was no stopping it. Not even by Shiroyama Kyousuke or the White Queen. The situation would only deteriorate from here. Like the beginning of a nuclear war no one had wanted.
(Are you kidding me? I can’t imagine this happened by accident. What is this? It’s like a nightmare drawn on construction paper with red and black crayon. *Whose scenario is this*!?)

Just as Aoi was starting to dodge the issue by anthropomorphizing this disaster so she had someone to direct her hatred at, her thoughts started to grasp something.
It felt like a strange tingle down her spine.
“Bring it on.”
But before she could figure anything out, Shiroyama Kyousuke pushed it.
He pushed the switch of doom that had to be avoided at all costs.
“Bring it on, love monster!! The cocoon and Colorless Little Girl are secondary. You haven’t done anything wrong. I admit it. Your love is probably real. But I still have something to say to you. I will protect my family. How many of my loved ones do you have to kill before you’re satisfied? If you’re gonna do it, then bring it directly to me. So bring it the hell on, you utter monster!!!!!”
Silence.
Silent silence.
Silent silent silence.
How did the White Queen view this situation?
With Shigara Masami and Biondetta’s encouragement, she had revealed her weak and soft side, worked up the courage to buy a present, and even hoped he would accept it, but this was how he responded. Oh, dear. I failed again, did I? That’s too bad. But we are family and not lovers, so it works out, doesn’t it? I suppose I will enjoy watching my beloved brother struggling to escape from me yet again☆ Ah ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha.
How much of that was true and how much was a fantasy?
The distinction hardly mattered anymore.
What had she gained from her journey to learn what it means to be human?
Nothing at all.
“…”
Left all alone in her own world, even the ringing in her ears was gone.
There was nothing at all there.
“……
……”
And.
And.
And.
The White Queen crushed and shattered the bunny mug in its gift wrapping.
“Why is it always love this and romance that with you? Is that all you’ve got in your head? Is your brain nothing but romance? Oh, I see, I see. Is that it? Yeah, it’s always fun supporting love, isn’t it? Well, screw that! Is that what all of the crap with your worshipers has been about? Some cheap pickup artist technique where you have someone cause trouble so you can swoop in and save me!? It’s so cliché even Shakespeare would steer clear! Apologize! Apologize to the world! How do you think Azalea or The Saint would feel if they heard this!? You should really learn how to feel shame! It’s always about you, isn’t it!? Is bringing a guy and girl together really that noble a

goal!? Wow, and is that what the whole White Queen thing is about!? Is it supposed to give you a bridal image!? You exist beyond every last god, so why the hell are you focus on the one religion and culture when it comes to that!? It's not fair, really. If I complain, I bet everyone else will say I'm being immature! They'll say I shouldn't speak to a cute girl like that! Oh, whoops. Shouldn't have said that! Is your romance-obsessed brain jumping for joy over being called cute: 'cute, cute, he called me cute, wa ha ha!' Well, forget it! Why do you walk all over people as soon as you meet them!? And with a smile on your face to boot! Aren't you afraid of what might happen!? And your very existence is like some kind of joke! How is anyone supposed to fall in love with you!? Try thinking how it feels to be on the receiving end of your advances! How many times do I have to say 'no' before it gets through to you!? No means no, so just give up! Can't you start by installing the concept of 'giving up' in your romance brain!? I don't want romance. Like, not at all! And you can't try to wrap this up by saying all's well that ends well! Don't you know how much damage you've caused already!? And you claim it was all for your love!? What the hell is that!? I don't care how much of a hit at the box office that love story is, I'm not going to let you get away with it! None of it makes any sense! It's weird! Just fight like normal! I don't really get it, but quit trying to mix all this extra crap in there! Take this seriously! Wasn't the point of this to use a Blood-Sign to summon a super strong Material and see what lies beyond the limits of humanity!? But that's all gone to waste when some idiot started going on about love and romance! Don't you feel any responsibility at all!? You're the strongest in the world, aren't you!? Don't you realize you're in the center of it all!? I don't want some all-knowing and all-powerful being making all her decisions because she's horny! Even Zeus had Hera to slow him down! Is this world just completely broken or something!? I can't explain it. What do we tell all the true heroes who died in the past incidents and wars? 'You died because god was horny and got a little carried away'!? Can't you just move on already!? First loves never work out! So forget about me and find someone else! I'm sure you won't even remember my name 5 seconds later! Why do you need to think your love is so special!? That's the problem! That's why you're so obsessed! All 7 billion people on this planet do this love thing! Include bugs and animals and it's nothing but year-round sex, sex, and more sex! Is sex really that important to you, you creep!? Is sex all you ever think about!? It doesn't matter how hard you try, a sex freak like you just isn't going to fit with a human! So don't try to cram those mismatched puzzle pieces together! I can't take it anymore! It's really going to break me!!!!!!"

"Shut up! Is it always family this and family that with you!? When are you going to take that pacifier out of your mouth!? It's creepy, you mama's boy! Oh, wait, no! I'm sorry! I had that wrong! It was your *little sister*, wasn't it!? But that's not much different! How long are you going to keep dragging Doctor S around with you, you gloomy creep! Eh? What, were you doing it

all for attention!? Well, sorry again! Yes, yes. Look at the cute widdle baby. Is it time for you milky-wilky? How about that!? Satisfied now!? Try to be self-reliant for once! You can leave the house, you know!? Your family isn't just going to run away while you're out! So don't worry! Did you think it made you look like a caring badass if you got super anxious about every little thing!? Well, think again! It's just creepy! How do you even get to your age without knowing how to maintain a healthy distance from your family!? What is wrong with you!? I can't take it anymore either! So you say love is unconditional and you can't be disillusioned out of it!? You say if that was enough to break it, then it was fake to begin with!? Brother, that makes you no different from a chick opening its mouth and waiting to be fed! It's so incredibly, incredibly, incredibly juvenile and silly! Are you sure your brain is working right!? If you have time to put on the 'heh, I'm the strongest, so you can't trick me' act, then how about using that alleged intellect for some self-analysis!? No, I guess you couldn't do that, could you? If you actually took an objective look at yourself, you would probably just kill yourself on the spot. Aren't humans one of the few living creatures that commit suicide? Oh, how strange. How strange indeed. You claim to care about family more than anyone else, but you aren't even aware how much of a burden you are on that precious family! That's the thing about morons who think they're geniuses! It's like how people can't smell their own body odor! Now that's a saying worth putting on your gravestone, brother! Or how about I use my charisma to start a new religion and have it written verbatim into the scriptures!? Then you'll be the idiot of the millennium, spoken of for a thousand years to come! Oh, dear. What's wrong? What's wrong, widdle baby? Are you gonna cry!? Well, are you!? But unfortunately, I'm about at the end of my patience too and I have zero interest in cheering you up or comforting you! There's no point in attempting the impossible after all! I'm so very tired, so feel free to just ignore me and go crying to Big Sister Biondetta or Mama Shigara Masami and get them to give you some milk! Ah ha ha. Hee hee hee. Why did you ever seem so wonderful!? Maybe it was me who was broken, not you! In that case, you didn't do anything wrong. I suppose I really was being a nuisance to you since there isn't a single good thing about you! Yes, if I'm getting so worked up over a worm like you, I guess my love really was just an illusion in the first place! Agh, there's no use denying how I feel, you stupid, stupid, stupid, brother!!!!!!"

A short silence followed.
The boy and girl glared at each other from close range while grinding their teeth.
Their faces were wrinkled with rage.
And for once, they actually spoke in perfect unison.
“I’ll kill you!!!!!!”
“I’ll kill you!!!!!!”

Facts

- The White Queen’s feelings of love were real.
- But Shiroyama Kyousuke wanted the love of a family instead of that dangerous love. That may have been a longing for what he had never been given due to the harsh experiments by Doctor S and the Queen’s Miniature Garden.
- Isabelle detected this distortion early on. At the end of the fight with Biondetta during the Girl’s Backdoor incident, she voiced her disappointment when Kyousuke, the only one to truly be given love by the White Queen, insisted he had only seen the Queen’s fear.

Ending X-02: Find a Way Out of Certain Doom

“I will side with the boy. But I will not explain why. It’s too embarrassing!!”
“Yes, take care of Kyousuke-kun!!”
(Ending X-02 Open 08/23 12:20)
Find a Way Out of Certain Doom

The thing expanding across Kingdom F’s border was not an explosion or a dome.
It was a cocoon.
It was a medium for letting something grow.
And the Sword of Truth, which was the White Queen’s battle costume, was a force used to ensure she was always right. It would make white black or vice-versa. To do that, it would automatically fight and bring victory to its master. If it lacked something, it would construct that something to make all the necessary preparations.
So when the cocoon suddenly opened, how many people were truly capable of gazing directly upon its contents? Most would have simply seen it as a massive white light. When not protected by the Blood-Sign System, it was difficult to see such a great spiritual and divine presence. It would only appear as a light unless you were Sekurtiti or someone else who had taken a step outside humanity without relying on the Blood-Sign System.
It was not quite like a rainbow.
It was more like a meteor shower launched from the ground.
Something frightening was released away from the puny planet.
It had responded to its original master’s desire.
It was offering her a true sword.
It was a white bolt of lightning.
The human clothing the White Queen had worn was obliterated.
“…ther…”
She now wore her white battle costume.
And with an energy resembling electricity, she was joined with…
“Brooooootherrrr

“Hee hee.”
In one corner of the hellish shopping center, someone could not contain their laughter as they watched those two enveloped by such great power.
“Hee hee hee. Hee hee. Hee hee hee hee hee.”
It was Biondetta Shiroyama.
That demon helped others take revenge and pushed them to take it much further than they had intended.
She held her body in the provocative waitress outfit and a tremor ran along her spin.
(Ah ha ha ha

As a vessel, Meinokawa Aoi had been able to view it all from a more detached position, so she noticed Waitress Demon Biondetta holding her body and trembling.
Accusing her now would accomplish nothing.
The sparks had already been thrown and it had already grown into a giant wildfire. Attacking the culprit now would not make the conflagration go away.
(Although I will give her a solid punch once this is over.)
Aoi made a mental note of that, but her biggest concern lay elsewhere: Shiroyama Kyousuke.
(That fool. Is this what happens when someone is never given any real love? A family is not always given to you unconditionally, but it is possible to make one yourself.)
This was not a political marriage of an older age.
Could a family be started from something other than love in this day and age?
(We still have a chance.)
The world had been ignited.
But Meinokawa Aoi still had a thought as she retightened her sarashi.
(His values are shockingly immature and childish, but I can still reach him. Accept it, boy. You desire love more than anyone, so just accept the simple fact that someone is offering you love right here!!)
“Hey!!”
A storm had blown in.
As the wind pummeled her, the shrine maiden held her silver hair down with a hand and called out to the enemy group.
Specifically, to Shigara Masami because she seemed the most reasonable.
“What do you want to do about this!? Which side are you taking!?”
<I can’t take sides here! I want happiness for both Kyousuke-kun and the White Queen. So even if she’s lost control, I can’t choose to abandon the White Queen!!>
(That’s what I wanted to hear.)
Meinokawa Aoi had pushed Kyousuke to this point. So no matter how pathetic, pitiful, ugly, and beyond reach he might seem, the silver-haired shrine maiden had no intention of leaving him all alone.
“I will side with the boy. But I will not explain why. It’s too embarrassing!!”
<Yes, take care of Kyousuke-kun!!>
They made no mistake here. The two of them were enemies.
But Meinokawa Aoi still smiled fiercely at the woman in a suit and lab coat.
“Neither side needs to hold back. Let’s give this everything we’ve got. It’s too late for tears or regrets!!”

And.
Somewhere in this world or the other, someone gently opened her eyes.

It was a small translucent girl. She looked to be around 10. A faint light at the center of her chest flashed in time with her heartbeat. A portion of her long hair stuck up like cat ears and her undeveloped body was contained in something like a leotard. Swords, spears, guns, axes, staffs, hammers, chains, katanas, and other weapons surrounded her hips like a long skirt and 12 thick tomes recording different ends of the world floated in a ring behind her back.
She was The Colorless Little Girl Dedicated to a Single Goal (aie – a – oio – ei – ueo – ioa – e – uai – ee).
In order to kill the White Queen, she was preparing for battle to match the growing strength of the cocoon, but the actual trigger was found elsewhere.
<Nii-sama.>

Had the boy even noticed?
He had gathered everything necessary to defeat the White Queen, but had he noticed what kind of energy had been mixed in?
<Nii-sama, I will protect you this time.>
Thinking back, that was all this Unexplored-class had ever tried to do.
Even though the psychogenic shock of actually destroying the White Queen had created an unexpected error, this one part of her had remained.
<Now that I’ve been reborn, it’s my turn to help you, Nii-sama.>

Facts

- Biondetta had remained a revenge helper from beginning to end. That was why she had egged the White Queen on with a smile despite knowing this would happen. That was why she had helped the Queen find a change of clothes and a present even though she had predicted it would all fall apart.
- The cocoon has been released. Whatever hatched has given the White Queen the power she needs.
- Meinokawa Aoi did not think all hope was lost. Shigara Masami agreed.
- The soul of Shiroyama Kyousuke's *little sister* was included in the materials for the Colorless Little Girl. It is unclear if Kyousuke was aware of it, but given how he handled the Rainy Girl, humans – even dead ones – have a hard time letting go. Based on that, it is likely that his *little sister* secretly included herself in the mix of her own free will.
- The Third Style vs. the Fourth Style. A dangerous love vs. a family's love. The time has finally come for the girl and the rabbit to clash head-on.

Afterword

“……”
“……”
(Postscript Open ??/?? ??:??)
Afterword

Okay, this is Kamachi Kazuma!!
Blood-Sign has finally made it this far. There were a lot of unstable aspects to this one and I imagine some parts were difficult to read. But it was not Kyousuke who was shaken. It was everyone around him (including the White Queen). You should see this if you open up Volume 1 again, but Kyousuke has been consistent in his focus on killing the Queen throughout the series. It never seemed so awful before, but that was because she was surrounded by worshipers, so very powerful, and entirely beyond reach. But with Shigara Masami breaking through to the White Queen’s girly side at the end of the last volume, all of that has been shaken. *Oh?* you realize. *Could she be the type who cries if you push back too much?*
For better or for worse, the setting of this series only works with the White Queen.
Kyousuke tried all sorts of plans on the assumption that she could handle everything he threw at her, but now Shigara Masami and Meinokawa Aoi are asking him if that is really what he wants to do. What matters here is that Kyousuke remains unshaken and ends up assuming they have been influenced by the Queen’s charisma.
The greatest enemy of a battle story is not the unfairly strong final boss or the power inflation; I think it is a mood saying you can no longer keep fighting. There’s no need to fight! Let’s throw down our weapons, laugh, and hug!! …What could be worse for someone who wants to settle things once and for all? And the White Queen has radiant beauty, unmatched wisdom, and irresistible charisma in addition to her brutal violence, so she could make that happen if she wanted. But after seeing so many veteran summoners and vessels transformed into her worshipers, Kyousuke would never give in even if any normal person would have been moved to emotion and let go of their Blood-Sign. He would stubbornly press on. That might be a necessary talent for truly fighting the White Queen to the end.

Meanwhile, the White Queen is looking back on what she has done and finally become aware of how much pressure she has placed on Kyousuke and how twisted that has made him. Returning him to normal will not be easy, but nothing will ever improve if you throw in the towel just because something isn't easy. So she will change tack to something more traditional: if he will not come to me, I will go to him.
Kyousuke wants love more than anyone and the Queen is offering him love. The fact that the White Queen, who exists beyond the gods, is making a wish may be the most important point of this volume.
…But nothing can ever be that easy in this series. After all, misunderstandings are the key to a love comedy!! There is more than one kind of love and Kyousuke wanted a family's love instead of a dangerous love. That is the greatest distortion here. …You might have been able to see this coming if you saw how important he viewed his memories of the artificial family in the Queen's Miniature Garden and how he immediately cut all ties with the vessels (who could be seen as possible lovers) and never intruded on their families.
However.
Things ended in a soft landing due to Biondetta's conspiracy, but I think the White Queen would have failed even without that. If the strongest of the strongest suddenly tries to approach someone by bringing herself down to their level, I say she's definitely going to be awkward about it and screw it up. I actually think she was spared some damage by having the blame lie with Biondetta instead of her own ineptitude, but what do all of you think?
At the very end, there was a scene where Kyousuke and the Queen release all of their pent-up frustrations, but if you thought they sounded like they were actually enjoying themselves, you were right. The White Queen in particular earned lots of moe points by insulting him so much but then making a last-second U-turn into "Agh, there's no use denying how I feel, you stupid, stupid, stupid, brother!!!!!!"
The White Queen and the Colorless Little Girl.
Comparing them might be a good way of comparing the opposing forms of love: a dangerous love and a family's love.
…Man, and then there's Meinokawa Aoi. I know I'm the one writing her, but she doesn't play fair. Drinking the One Cup Yokozuna, treating untouchable Sinceria like a gorilla, and pushing Kyousuke away only to hug him later. She's just unstoppable. And she made no mistakes in what she was doing. It was supposed to be a sticky drama of love and hate, but she somehow turned things into a refreshing display of sportsmanship at the end.

I give my thanks to my illustrator Ikawa Waki-san and my editors Miki-san, Anan-san, Nakajima-san, Miyazaki-san, Yamamoto-san, and Mitera-san. In a way, the White Queen was already in her perfect form, so it couldn't have been easy to then give her a different outfit. Sorry about all the trouble I've caused you.

And I give my thanks to the readers. I wanted to show how the world has been so badly shaken, but is that what you saw when you actually read through the text? I was trying to make it all seem like a big mess, so I apologize if that made it hard to read. I hope you will read the next one too.

And I will end this here.

Now, which do you want: a dangerous love or a family’s love?
-Kamachi Kazuma

?

It was known as the Antlion Pit.
The world police of Government used that prison to hold criminals who had committed serious crimes using Materials. That was another side of South America's Devil's Island where Azalea Magentarain was staying.
The shrine maiden twins were deep, deep underground, but even there, they doubted they had seen the true horrors of this facility. This was only the visiting room. The reinforced glass separated two entirely different worlds. Their circumstances and feelings were completely different, so food made in the exact same kitchen would taste completely different.
Meinokawa Renge and Meinokawa Higan.
One had long black hair and one had long blonde hair. They pressed their cheeks together to listen to the same phone receiver.
A man in the prime of his life held an identical receiver on the other side of the thick glass. That summoner wearing an oxygen mask was well-known in their field.
He was known only as Doctor S.
"Are you running out of questions to ask me?"
"I see, I see."
"I will say I am impressed you managed to track me down after I was passed from prison to prison a few times. That coincidental luck of the draw may even be superior to Kingdom F's outsourced intelligence agency. While I will not say no to spending time with such lovely young ladies, there is honestly not much I can tell you about Kyousuke. He succeeded on his own and spread his wings on his own. I have no responsibility or fault there."
"I see…"
"What is he doing now?"
Doctor S grinned and leaned toward the reinforced glass.
He was addicted to thrills.
He knew the fear was there, so he wanted to view it from a position of safety.
"I created a precision-guided missile, but he threw out that perfected weapon and became a rogue weapon flying uncontrollably around the world. He's still screwing things up to this day, isn't he? He's broken at the most fundamental level, so it doesn't matter what you build up from that foundation. That's why he will never gain anything no matter how hard he tries."

“Higan.” The one twin called the other’s name. “Hold the receiver for me. Then cover your ears and shut your eyes. Don’t open them again until you count to 30 in your head. Can you promise me that?”
“U-u-um?”
“Hurry.”
It may have been Renge’s ability to make demands like this that made her the “older” twin sister.
Higan obediently did as she was told, so Renge found her to be a truly wonderful “little” sister.
Meinokawa Renge grinned and rolled up the right sleeve of her shrine maiden outfit.
She was showing off her strength.
“What are you doing?” asked Doctor S.
There was no point in answering. Not when it would be faster to just do it.
She was a Joruri Method, giving her strength beyond the human limits.
She shut off her limiters and sent her fist crashing through the 5cm-thick reinforced glass and into the scummy face on the other side.
An incredible crash rang out after a short delay and then a shrill alarm began blaring.
“My god!!” shouted the large black guard in the room.
(I wasn’t really designed to do that. Yeah, my shoulder’s cartilage is fried. I need to get some maintenance done by grampa once we’re back home.)
By the time Higan widened her eyes in surprise, Renge had already pulled her arm back like nothing had happened. She stood nonchalantly next to her sister.
“W-w-waaaaaaaaaahhhh!? R-Renge, what did you just do? His oxygen mask is broken, his chair fell backwards, and he’s foaming at the mouth. What happened!?”
“Uhhh…”
“That 5cm glass can stop a bullet, can’t it? Did you pull out a rocket launcher or something!?”
“Good, we’re back to normal.”
Renge secretly clenched her fist in triumph. It did not occur to Higan that her sister might have broken through bulletproof glass with her bare hand.
She was so glad her sister was so pure.
There was no point in sticking around, so she turned around and left the visiting room.
And.
She winked toward her sister who frantically followed after her.
“Listen, Higan. It doesn’t matter what exists beyond the gods. There are some things you can’t forgive no matter what clever justifications and arguments people come up with.”

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